

ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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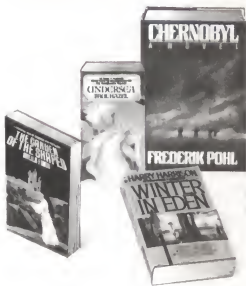
Welcome to our fall list

There's a lot to get excited about this season, with some major novels by long-time masters, big books by young writers deserving of notice, and plenty of great entertainment.

SEPTEMBER: If you've read **Harry Harrison's** breathtaking alternate prehistory *West of Eden*, *Winter in Eden* needs no introduction. This highly-acclaimed sequel is now available in paperback. *Chernobyl* by **Frederik Pohl** is one of the most important novels of the year, a stunning speculation on what it must have been like to be present during the most dangerous nuclear accident in our history. *Undersea* by **Paul Hazel** is the second novel in the brilliant high fantasy saga, the *Finnbranch Trilogy* (which began with *Yearwood* and concludes in December with *Winterking*). And **Sheila Finch**, who has received raves for her first two novels, *Infinity's Web* and *Triad*, presents her third, a tale of struggle between races of gene-manipulated humans entitled *The Garden of the Shaped*.

OCTOBER: The Rat is back. *The Stainless Steel Rat Gets Drafted* by **Harry Harrison** chronicles the further adventures of the infamous "Slippery Jim" diGriz. It's wonderful, non-stop fun. *Dover Beach* by **Richard Bowker** is a moving novel about America after a "limited" nuclear war and the search for a missing scientist. Bowker is a very gifted writer who has won praise for his recent novels, *Replica* and *Marlborough Street*. Speaking of gifted writers, **Pamela Sargent's** far-future novel *The Shore of Women* is quite an accomplishment. It was called "one of the great novels of science fiction" by *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. And *Clypsis* by **Jeffrey A. Carver** is the first novel in **Roger Zelazny's** *Alien Speedway*, a hot new space opera series designed by one of the most imaginative minds in the business.

SEPTEMBER



OCTOBER



NOVEMBER: *The Universe* edited by **Byron Preiss** is simply incredible. This tour of the galaxy and beyond includes award-caliber short fiction by the likes of Poul Anderson, Gregory Benford, David Brin, Robert Silverberg, Connie Willis and others, mind-stretching essays by some of the leading astronomers in the world, and over 40 gorgeous full-color illustrations and photographs. American Book Award winner **Lisa Goldstein**, who writes like a dream, will publish *A Mask for the General*, a near-future novel about power and responsibility. *The Goldcamp Vampire* is **Elizabeth Scarborough's** latest, a high-spirited fantasy with Alaskan gold, vampires, were-moose and a young journalist up to her neck (you'll pardon the expression) in trouble. (We'll be reissuing Scarborough's *The Harem of Aman Akbar* in September and the omnibus *Songs from the Seashell Archives, Volume One* [which contains *Song of Sorcery* and *The Unicorn Creed*] in October.) The totally outrageous *Wild Cards* series edited by **George R.R. Martin is back with *Jokers Wild*—the latest chapter in the secret history of our times. **Jonathan Wylie** begins a bold new fantasy trilogy, *Servants of Ark*, with *The First Named*. And we'll be reissuing **Ursula K. Le Guin's** unforgettable short story collection, *The Compass Rose*.**

DECEMBER: As good as the fall list is, the absolute highlight is **Gregory Benford's** new novel, *Great Sky River*. Suffice it to say that it's the best novel he's written yet—which is another way of saying it's one of the best hard sf novels ever. There's another terrific sf novel in December, *After Long Silence* by **Sheri Tepper**. It's a big, absorbing tale of alien contact that Anne McCaffrey called "magnificent." **Rose Estes** launches a powerful prehistoric fantasy trilogy this month, *Saga of the Lost Lands*, with *Blood of the Tiger*. And we'll reissue *Star Rebel* and *Rebel's Quest*, two novels in F.M. Busby's Hulzein Dynasty saga, in one big volume entitled *The Rebel Dynasty, Volume One*.

We're quite proud of this list. And wait until you hear about what we have coming this winter. We think you'll be very pleased.

With warmest regards for the future,

John Burt Foster

Publisher, Bantam Spectra



NOVEMBER



DECEMBER





A Message From Our Alien Publisher

Clean Up Your Own Mess

You probably did not realize that dried-on latex paint can be removed from clothes with any pine-based cleaner. Just apply the cleaner directly to the spot, then wash the garment. I know this information is of very little use on a planet that has neither pine trees nor paint (not to mention clothing), but it is a matter of considerable interest to human beings. Paint stains are one of the least tractable of human problems.

In keeping with my mission to identify and explain the dominant themes of human life, I attach to this transmission an item called *Mary Ellen's Best of Helpful Hints*. In addition, you will find 50 issues of *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Employee Relations Manual of the Mega Mutual Life Insurance Company*, and the biography of a person called Oliver North.

"Clean up your own mess" is the first law of human existence, imparted to the cubs by loving teachers in a place called kindergarten. This law is what makes Mary Ellen's hints so popular. Did you realize that you can clean the grout between tiles using a toothbrush and denture cream? Human beings abhor messes. They want to clean them up. At least they say they do.

As in so many other areas of human life, there is a storm-tossed gulf between what the creatures say and what they do. You must keep this in mind when you read *The Wall Street Journal*. There you will read stories of companies victimized by subversive environmentalists, industries cheated by unscrupulous

foreigners, and managers persecuted by greedy labor unions. Only rarely will you find accounts of industries that despoil the natural environment, companies mismanaged to the point that they create marketing opportunities for more energetic firms, or managers so oafish and incompetent that they drive their workers to seek relief in formal organization.

Notwithstanding what he's learned in kindergarten, a human being always feels it is better to hide a mess than to clean one up. To facilitate this hiding process, there are laws and courts. Here is an example of how the system works. Let us say you manufacture some sort of appliance for sale to the public. Let us say that you use defective parts in the merchandise and represent it as being perfectly sound. People hurt themselves with your appliances. Some of them are killed.

On our planet, of course, you would go to the courts to seek help finding all the people who had been hurt so you could make restitution. I know it sounds crazy, but if you were a human being, you would go to the courts to seek relief from the people you had hurt. You would contend in court that: (1) nobody really got hurt; (2) if anybody did, it was their own fault; (3) if they got hurt and it was not their own fault, it must have resulted from natural causes, foreign competition, defense of the national security, or all of the above.

I should point out, however, that business people refuse to own up to their own messes largely as a matter of self-defense. People

who hurt themselves by being reckless or otherwise out of touch with their environments will always try to find a way to blame it on someone else, preferably someone with an insurance policy. So a human being who hurts himself will go after the manufacturer of any device he was using at the time. He will then take his lawyer into court with him and prove that: (1) the device is defective; (2) if it is not defective, it is inherently dangerous; (3) if it is neither defective nor inherently dangerous, it is possessed by demons and the manufacturer should have taken steps to avoid such possession; or (4) all of the above.

The pattern is similar for all other human activity. Take the Mega Mutual Life Insurance Company. When you read through the employee relations manual, you will see the most elaborate prescriptions for the structure of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. The company feels it cannot allow any natural human relationship to emerge between bosses and employees. Natural human relationships do not stand up to scrutiny in court.

In fact, Mega Mutual has a vice president of personnel whose sole job it is to buy off fired employees who want to sue Mega Mutual. The company has found that, regardless of the merits of any particular case, 80 percent of the time the employee can be persuaded to drop the whole matter for \$1,500. It costs \$3,000 to field a team of lawyers and make

(Continued to page 22)



EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

Achieving Orbit

This issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* marks the completion of our first year of publication — and that, in the world of magazine publishing, is a minor miracle of sorts.

It's even more of a miracle in the field of science fiction. We have, so to speak, achieved orbit, and that in large part is thanks to you, our readers.

We still have our work cut out for us, since, having done the difficult, we plan to do the impossible — become the first real space-age science fiction magazine.

With each new issue we have managed to modify and improve. As we continue to grow and succeed, we will make more improvements. Last issue we went to quality paper throughout and were able to burn the cover logo into the cover art.

Each of those improvements has added to the cost of producing the magazine, but each improvement is worth it. The only reason we did not do the same this issue is that the cover art had no room at the top for the magazine's title without damaging the illustration — and that's something we don't like to do.

Two issues ago we announced that Waldenbooks had agreed to carry *Aboriginal Science Fiction* and this issue we are pleased to announce that B. Dalton's has also agreed to carry the magazine. They are the two largest book chains in the country.

Our immediate goal is to bring in enough advertising, or growth, to warrant a slick cover. If all goes according to plan, we

may be able to do that in our November issue, which would be a nice way to kick off our second year of publication.

The next step will be to add to the page count, which will let us provide more stories and art in each issue. And our long-term goal is to make *Aboriginal Science Fiction* the first successful full-slick, full-color science fiction magazine. It's going to happen. Just be patient.

We don't think it's an impossible dream. We've already done the hardest part. And with your continued help the dream will move from our *Aborigine Dreamtime* into reality.

One of the odd and ironic disadvantages of editing a science fiction magazine is that suddenly you no longer have time to read much — aside from the perpetually growing slushpile which Bruce Bethke momentarily took care of last issue.

That's where vacations come in handy. This July I managed to sneak off for two weeks and read a couple of books I snatched from the flow of review copies. One was a bound galley of *Chernobyl* (Bantam/Spectra) by Frederik Pohl. I'm not going to review the book — that's Darrell Schweitzer's job — but it is an interesting read and should do well.

Fred and his wife, Elizabeth Anne Hull (whose "Second Best Friend" was in *ABO* #2), were visiting the Soviet Union when one of the reactors in the Chernobyl complex exploded. Later he went back to do more research on the disaster for the book. His

novel provides some startling glimpses of Soviet high technology and how the Soviet government's monthly quota system compromises quality.

In his guest column in this issue, "Chernobyl and Challenger: That Was the Year That Was" Fred shares some of his findings with us.

Other books I had a chance to enjoy during my brief vacation included Connie Willis's *Lincoln's Dreams* (Bantam/Spectra), Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime* (Bantam/Spectra), Greg Bear's *The Forge of God* (TOR Books), David Brin's *The Uplift War* (Bantam Spectra), and Joan Slonczewski's *The Door Into Ocean* (Avon). I recommend them all.

In our first issue we announced a contest to name our alien publisher. We're sure it has its own, untranslatable, name, but we'd like to give it a handle a little easier on the human tongue.

This is your last chance. All entries or suggested names must be received at our P.O. Box by November 15. The person who submits the winning name will win a lifetime (yours or ours) subscription to *Aboriginal Science Fiction*.

And, finally, I'd like to apologize — this issue is one to two weeks late because we went to NASFiC (the North American Science Fiction Convention) in Phoenix, Arizona. I haven't calculated how to be in two places at the same time — yet. But I am working on it.

— ABO —

The Milk of Knowledge

By Ian Watson

Art By Bob Eggleton

"You can't go home again," said Thomas Wolfe, back in the Twentieth Century. You can't relive the past.

Wise words.

Unfortunately, wrong.

For the past *can* recapture you. I am forty-one years old. I ought to be living out in Celesteville, our European space colony at the L-4 libration point. Its existence means that we are safe at last. Safe. If the whole chaotic Planet Earth goes smash, at least Celesteville will survive — as will Skytopia over at the L-5 libration point.

But it isn't the year 2090 any longer. It's 2063 again, and here I am back on Earth in Greater Birmingham, Europa, in my dead parents' tower-slot. They're alive. I'm fourteen years old. Just as I used to be, once upon a time...

Twice upon a time, now! Time has looped back. My mind has fled back down my lifeline into younger flesh, dispossessing my fourteen-year-old self. I'm imprisoned in my own past.

Is this a miracle? Can there be horrible miracles as well as kindly ones?

Whatever could have happened in 2090 to cause this? I can only think that I died — so suddenly that I didn't even notice dying. I died, and was reborn. And who's to say that a person *must* be reincarnated later on in the future? Why not in the past, in his own past? Maybe the Sun exploded in a nova, and every single creature died, every host of souls, so that now there is only the past to be reborn in!

But according to the Infoscreen this world of AD 2063 scrapes along as ordinarily as ever. A few billion people have not suddenly woken up all over this pox-ridden globe — preincarnated, or deincarnated, or whatever one can call it. I dare not interrogate the Infoscreen in so many words about this possibility, though, or it would diagnose me as insane. I would be taken away for drug and shock treatment.

It seems I am unique in my predicament. So I shall keep quiet about my uniqueness for the moment.

My body image feels all wrong. I can still sense myself extending beyond my present feet, beyond my present hands: someone taller, slimmer, healthier. But I'm crushed into a short, tubby mass like somebody who has been stuffed into a suitcase.

I must remember how to be normal, here in 2063.

Milk for breakfast, today being Fourthday. (Oh the beautiful herds of Guernsey cows grazing on the meadows of Celesteville!) My Mum smiles caringly as she empties the pack of milk into my plastic beaker, shaking out every last drop. She realizes that I'm overweight. Many people are overweight. She is, too. But it isn't from any surfeit of riches. It's because we only get junk food most of the time. My Dad, exceptionally, has managed to stay slim by playing squash at the Leisuredome. My Mum and Dad will both be very slim at the end of next year, from endless diarrhea, when the Epidemic of '64 arrives. Soon they'll be skeletons. (Mum, Dad: Dear strangers! How can I save you?) Dad keys in the early morning news on the Infoscreen. It's the Indonesian Crisis, all over again. ("Don't worry," I want to say. "It'll pass. We'll scrape through this one. Then the next one, then the one after. I'm afraid that you personally won't survive it. But I will. The world will — unlikely as that seems, right now in 2063.")

"Drink up, Johnny."

Mum microwaves some junk sausages. Offal and sawdust.

Obediently I drink...and taste something of the flavour of Celesteville. Not much, but something.

"A newsflash just in from the Viennese Free State reports the assassination of Chancellor Karl-Heinz Kraus by Greater Europa extremists. Details follow. EuroGov Brussels entirely dissociates itself..."

"Oh God," says Dad softly. "Not him."

("It'll pass, Dad. I know it will.")

I drain my beaker.

Milk. Like...the milk of knowledge...

I came across the story in Celesteville once, when I was accessing at random through ancient literature. It was in the works of a Twelfth Century Arab philosopher, Ibn 'Arabi.

Once there was a man named Taqi ibn Mukhallad who experienced a dream-vision of the Prophet Mohammed, and in this dream the Prophet presented Taqi with a cup of milk to drink. Now, Taqi believed this to have been a true vision of the Prophet. But just to verify it, when he woke up the next morning he forced himself to vomit. He threw up enough fresh, sweet milk to fill a cup. But that milk signified *knowledge*. If Taqi had stopped to think more deeply about his dream, he would have realized this. By doing as he did he obtained a little physical proof, but he deprived



himself of a great knowledge — equal to what he had drunk...

Poor Taqi.

Shall I vomit up my own milk of knowledge? Shall I tell?

If I tell, surely I can change the world! I can show everyone the way through. I can save the cosmonauts who will crash on Mars. I can forewarn the world of the Epidemic of '64, and the *Beagle* crisis of '69, and the Tientsin reactor melt-down. I can warn of the Great Beast: Donna Marquez, the "Divine Marquise" of Peru. I can save a million martyrs from pain and death. I can save hundreds of millions of human beings from epidemic and catastrophe...

If I can forewarn. It will be difficult for a fourteen-year-old boy. The chances are that I would be shocked and drugged back into my senses — or, when my first prophecy came true, I would become the prisoner of EuroGov, the exploited oracle in a cage, the target of kidnapping and assassination.

And would I really change the world, as I imagine? Once I had changed one thing, wouldn't all future events change subtly as well? If I vomited up all the milk of my knowledge of twenty-seven years, how could that very future which I was trying to improve ever come into being? A paradox. The milk gone sour, in the udder.

When you come down to basics — if you can put aside the agonies of the coming years — survival is the main thing. And the world does survive. It scrapes through — till 2090, at any rate. That would seem enough of a miracle today. Celesteville. Skytopia. Might I not derail that future? If I wasn't simply taken away for therapy...

So I keep the milk down. I need a plan. But I can't think of one.

Come on, Taqi, help me out! If I'm a Time-Messiah, somebody should have told me why!

My own Screen chimes loudly, though in my bed-slot. It is five minutes till school-time. Though there are no schools as such, now that education is computerised.

There must be a reason. (Mustn't there?)

I'm powerless — with such power over the destiny of the world. And using my power might wash it all away. And how do I get to use it in the first place?

"Don't be late, Johnny."

But I am late. I'm twenty-seven years later than anybody else in this world.

"Guten Morgen, Johnny!" announces my Screen with a personalised impersonality. "Heute wir..." Today we begin with German.

Followed, I sincerely hope, by French. I speak these two Euro-tongues really fluently now. ("Now," being later on in time. Orphaned by the Epidemic, I will go to Ruhrstadt as a ward of EuroGov — and thence eventually I will blast off to the paradise of Celesteville. Once it has been conceived. Once it has been built.)

In fact, I speak French and German all too well. ODA — the Ongoing Diagnostic Assessment — compliments me on the sudden improvement in my accent and fluency. Then an hour later it suggests tartly that

I have been concentrating too much on languages at the expense of Biochemistry — at which suddenly I am a cretin. I try to keep my proficiency in Maths down to the expected level. But then, when it's time for French, it's hard to hobble my tongue. And ODA has a nose for these things. *ODA stinks*: kids used to aerosol that on the walls. I am praised, and warned again.

I will have to hobble my tongue — until I have a plan.

I was no swimmer then; but now I am.

The education rules insist that we scattered schoolboys come together for a communal splash at the Leisuredome, overseen by a doddering old supervisor and a hulking sadistic lifeguard. What a nightmare this used to be for me, what an ordeal of the fat flesh! All the crashing bodies, the pullings underwater, the strip-thefts of swim-gear. How many times was I the victim, running flabbily around with my balls bobbing, begging for my trunks while they were tossed from hand to hand? I used to think of suicide. My only chance of safety was to be the fat mascot of one of the school gangs — even if they frequently took it into their heads to play cruel games with their mascot. I had to clown it for them, tears in my eyes. But the tears looked like swimming pool water.

But this afternoon I cleave the chlorinated blue. I leap from the diving board. I sound like a whale. My mind remembers, and my body obeys. Needless to say, my untuned muscles will scream about it afterwards. Not yet, though. Not yet.

My gang stares, amazed.

I laugh.

"It's the triumph of the will!" The fools don't know what I'm talking about. Of course not.

This won't do, though. One petty triumph isn't enough.

Just to get things straight I start compiling a chart of the future. A future history.

Two wretched days later, I give up. The problem is insuperable. This would take me six months, and by then I'd be half mad. Anyway, when exactly *did* the Tientsin reactor melt down? Was it '75? Or '77? Or '79? When was the Imam Birjandi murdered? When was the nuking of Haifa? Who did kill Cock Robin?

Taqi, this never was your kind of knowledge.

When I was fifteen (that's to say, next year) I spent a few days with my Aunt Lisa down in London just before the Epidemic struck. She was friends with an American woman ... now what was her name? Rachel. Yes, Rachel Akerman. She was working in the US Embassy as an information officer. She was a downright randy lady, Rachel, though I didn't realize that, except in retrospect. Aunt Lisa and I went to a party in Rachel's flat in the same tower — and there I got drunk for the first time. I puked afterwards.

If I could ride the monorail down to London when I was fifteen, why not when I'm fourteen? After all, I've matured a lot in the last week — even if I do feel myself sliding back from the cool aplomb of

Celesteville into a naivete of the earlier flesh. If I can contact somebody in the American embassy... Can I possibly trust my fellow Britons? Containment is the name of the game in these islands. Oh, *bless* that Epidemic for shunting me to Ruhrstadt as an educational refugee. If we hadn't been so badly hit by the Epidemic I would never have got out. I would never have got off the surface of this planet. Of course, Ruhrstadt was lousy enough — though more orderly, need I say — and I can't possibly trust the Germans of this period either. As for the Russians and Chinese, British security police control all the comings and goings in and out of their embassies. The terrible secret that I know — the cause of the Epidemic — can, I think, only safely be told to one group of people, or else missiles might start flying...

Fourteen is a decent enough age to save the world, isn't it? Why, that kind of thing's the stuff of adventure stories on the Screen every week. Though usually the heroic boy co-operates with the security forces...

Incredibly, it comes off. Aunt Lisa will put me up. Mum and Dad will give me enough credit to let me go down to London for the mid-spring schoolbreak.

So down the monorail I presently bowl, reading a financial paper like some rich son of the Eurocracy — though I hardly look the part. Too fat. Too cheaply dressed. (Financiers, what things I could tell you!) Next year — that's to say, twenty-six years ago — what I was reading on the monorail train was Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, trying hard with my

adolescent inexperience to fathom the amorous sentiments of Fabrizio del Dongo locked up in his tower, peeping out at his love. My own view of sex at the time was very much from a high tower too. Or else it was a thing of fear and humiliation at the swimming pool. The tweaking of the balls. Jerking off underwater.

The American bald eagle spreads its wings for me. Skytopia!

It's quite easy to go upstairs and buzz Rachel's door after Aunt Lisa has phoned her.

I go in.

"What would you say, Rachel, if I told you that I know the future? If I told you that there'll be a worldwide epidemic next year, which will spare the West Coast of America for reasons as yet unknown? But your best president in years will die because he's in the East, which means in turn..." I can go on for quite a while; and I do. I hope I have my facts in the right order; it's all so *long* ago.

Rachel laughs. (She has large wet lips.)

"You're really weird. You believe all this!"

Soon, I'm making real progress. I may be a fat slob of a schoolboy here; but up-time in Celesteville I'm distinctly *sympathique*.

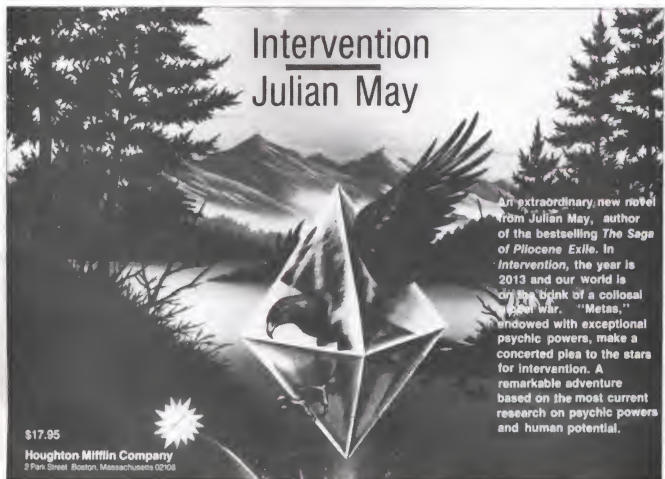
"Would you care for a drink, Johnny?"

"Just so long as it isn't gin." It was gin that I got sick-drunk on at her party; the experience inoculated me against gin for ever more.

"Is that some private joke?"

Sure thing. I won't vomit gin this time. Just milk.

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"Have you got access to the CIA desk, Rachel?"

"Oh, come on!"

"Let's just suppose you have. Now, how about dropping in on them tomorrow? Tell them you met a weird guy who described a fascinating satellite codenamed *Beagle*." When the scandal breaks in five years time, revealing a direct connection between the covert automated DNA experiments on board the *Beagle*, and the Epidemic...well, there'll almost be a nuclear war. The name *Beagle* won't mean Charles Darwin any more. "Just mention the name, and say that there's going to be a little bit of an epidemic of mutated cholera. Cold climate cholera. That ought to make them sit up. Oh, and you might add that if I tell anybody else there's quite likely to be a little cloud of radioactive dust in space — and you know what that could start."

"This sounds like a spy movie."

"Doesn't it just?"

"You're looking at me, Johnny."

"Here's looking at you. A cat can look at a queen."

"Like a cat who's found a bowl of milk."

"Purr."

Success! Relief! Back downstairs in bed I review Rachel's body and my plan of action. These two are superimposed. Here is a cusp, her breast, which is also the cusp where history either flows along its original course or else suffers a sudden discontinuity on to a different plane of events.

Orgasm of the flesh: orgasm of events exfoliating from this point! I suppose vomiting is a sort of orgasmic reflex too: a spasm of the muscles which spills something out of you. The congruence between sperm spilling from one tense organ and the milk of knowledge spewing from my gizzard occupies me for a moment. I'm sated, relaxed and gratified.

Day Two, of the new dispensation. I spend the day wandering round London.

In the evening I slip upstairs. More milk of knowledge and more sperm flow into Rachel. My ally, my bemused mistress — to whom I am suddenly a juvenile Rasputin — has done as she was bid. I love her for it. Energetically. I caress her cusps.

They come: two burly silent types — the sort who walk along beside motorcades — and the brain of the trio, a slice of American Gothic, Huffstickler by name. He's bespectacled (a funny old anachronism, even in 2063), and wears a herringbone suit with a tie knotted tight enough to rejoice a hangman. Huffstickler must throw a strangled tie away every night.

"Miz Akerman tells us you're interested in satellites. She said something about — what was the name, now? — something called a *Beagle*. We were just wondering —"

"I'll bet you're wondering. Now hear this very carefully: *Beagle* is going to malfunction soon and it's going to vent some of your cold cholera, which is going to drift down onto Japan. Not many people will realize for another five years just what it was that killed a few hundred million people, including your President Greenberg. But when the information *does* leak out —

and information always does leak — you are going to have to do some fancy footwork and pay out one hell of a lot of GNP in compensation. Or get nuked."

Huffstickler inspects his manicure. Abruptly he looks up; his eyes pin me like a butterfly ...

He inspects his nails again.

Again?

Nonsense vomits from my lips. Huffstickler gables some gibberish back at me. Suddenly I rush backwards to the door. How can I run backwards? Help me! It isn't me who rushes in reverse — this is being done to me! I'm accelerating. Blurred scenes flash backwards. No way to control this mad hindward roller-coaster! I vomit my breakfast. Resorb my excrement. The darkening of the dawn — and I die, no I *dream* — then the lightening of the previous night. Whoosh, goes yesterday, in flickers of London. Faster. Insane.

How long, how long? I'm riding down into a black hole where time turns inside out! Borne along, borne along.

Slowing, I'm slowing. I'm in Rachel's flat, for the first time. I'm naked in her bed, resorbing sperm from her flesh into mine! Resorbing the milk of knowledge!

I'm dressed, I dribble drink into a glass.

Lurch.

Time tips forward again...

"What would you say, Rachel, if I told you...?"

"Told me what, Johnny?"

"Nothing, nothing! I've got to be going."

"But you just arrived."

I flee from the room, a foolish boy, shamed. I vomit into Aunt Lisa's washbasin, as though I've already drunk Rachel's gin neat year.

The milk of knowledge I could not spew up. As soon as I tried to, I was... *rebound*. Back to the moment before I initiated the series of events.

Are there rules to this game? Are there ethics? "Thou shalt not consort with one side at the expense of the human race at large?" "Thou shalt not use thy power for fornication?"

Who says so? Whose rules are they?

Exhausted, I creep to bed.

Day Two again. This time I approach the reception desk at one of the TV stations. Public information for the benefit of all...

I get passed upstairs — more as a joke, the silly season arriving months ahead of time. But as soon as I meet an actual news editor who begins to listen and make notes, *flip*: time winds me back again. Downstairs. I rush out of the TV station without approaching the reception desk, scowled at now by a suspicious guard.

At least, this time, I only lost twenty minutes. If it can be called losing time, when I gain it back again.

Yet I was able to tell the woman on the desk. Just as I was able to tell Rachel. Can I make private communications, but not public ones?

So who do I make them to? A psychiatrist?

Ja, yours is a most complex and integrated delusional system. Pardon me vile I open up your skull...

Oh Taqi, you never had this sort of trouble!



I try to phone the Government Ombudsman. Surprisingly, I get through. Presently the phone-tokens spit themselves back into my hand, unphoning him, leaving me where and when I was.

Again: I call at the Pan-Arab Cultural Center. Maybe they have Sufis employed on their staff — lords of hidden chains of cause and effect, who are also viziers of the practical world. Sufis are supposed to understand such things. Ibn 'Arabi was a Sufi.

And it seems that I'm in luck. They know the tale of Taqi, at least. And perhaps I have had a vision of the future, equivalent to his vision of Mohammed. Three hours, four, pass by while they put out feelers. They are being very delicate about the whole thing. I scoff desert dates; how yearningly the taste reminds me of Celesteville. I sip thimbles of real coffee, which my young palate marvels at and which my memory greets with joy.

Meanwhile events echo down the years, cascading about me.

And suddenly, with no warning, the world winds back. No-o-o-o-o-o...I howl down the hindward hours. I turn my steps away from the Cultural Center. No wise Sufi saved the day. No sheikh bailed me out.

Back home again.

Quote for the day (from S. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 1843):

"Did I not get myself doubly restored? Did I not get myself back again, precisely in such a way that I must doubly feel its significance? Only his children did Job not receive again double, because a human life is not a thing that can be duplicated. In that case only spiritual repetition is possible, although in the temporal life it is never so perfect as in eternity, which is the true repetition."

"How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? And if I am to be compelled to take part in it, where is the director? Is there no director? Whither shall I turn with my complaint?"

Thank you, Mum and Dad, I had a fine boyish holiday in thrilling London. And now I'm back to the tower-slot and the Infocscreen...and the swimming pool.

I suppose at least going to bed with Rachel was fun. Even though it never happened to her.

Never happened to her.

But to me it happened, yes.

And in a flash I realize that if incidents which the system rejects all get cancelled out for everybody but me — on account of their ramifications — why then, I can do any damn thing I please! I can thief and rape and kill. As soon as I get caught and explain myself, then the whole period of time gets rewound! It snaps right back like elastic.

That makes theft seem pretty pointless. I'd be robbed of the proceeds. But perhaps not rape or murder. I'd still have the satisfaction, if you can call it that.

And yet ... if I commit a crime and don't get found

out for a very long time, and then get found out, I might be required to flip back years. Just as I'm about to board the shuttle up to Celesteville, a hand will descend upon my shoulder — and *whoosh*, I'll be whipped back two whole decades to my fourteen-year-old flesh again. That would be ghastly.

Anyway, at fourteen I'm hardly cut out for rape and mayhem.

Ought I to be? Am I really in some psychiatrist's memory simulator having my personality toughened up so that I will have the stamina to be part of some interstellar expedition?

There's no expedition. Nobody has any idea how to build a star-drive. Not yet, in 2090.

Is this a moral intelligence test of some sort? Am I being taught not to rape and murder, not even to wish to deviate?

No, it's no simulation. Of that I'm sure. This is the actual year 2063, and I walk around the terrain of Greater Birmingham, not the terrain of my mind. My body says so. This fart says so, wet and fruity.

And so this proto-criminal, me, accesses on the Infocscreen that book by Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, recalled from ten years in the future.

"Repetition is transcendence," writes our Danish philosopher. "If God Himself had not willed repetition, the world would never have come into existence. He would have recalled it all and conserved it in recollection." (Did He perhaps do just that, after all? In my one single case? Is he conserving me in recollection, buzzing around the divine neurons in a loop?) "He who wills repetition is matured in seriousness." Why should that be, Mr. Kierkegaard? "Because repetition represents repentance on Man's part, and atonement on the part of God ..."

Such certainties did Kierkegaard discover on his own repetitious trip to Berlin in 1843, fleeing from the fair Regina Olsen, yearning to be reunited with her. What comparable certainties did I discover on my preemptive repeat-journey to London town, to the hot sheets of Rachel Akerman?

What am I on trial for? What am I supposed to repent about?

I've been set up. But was it by God — or by Man? I can't imagine that God would bother; I can't believe that Man could manage it.

But set up I have been.

"Repetition is an imperishable garment." Too right! Try to unpick it, and it knits itself back again right away.

A higher transcendental repetition awaits me? Does it indeed?

In eternity is the true repetition...And it's going to be eternal, this life of mine, if I get rewound every damn time I step out of line. And meanwhile the world will scrape along, with its epidemics, slaughters, disasters. And I will be powerless.

There's always suicide...

Is there? Is there indeed? Or if I kill myself, do I get rewound back to the moment before I killed myself? *Death is not lived through*, said Wittgenstein. Can death be lived through in reverse?

Dare I kill myself as an experiment?
But maybe I'm already dead, and this is Hell or Purgatory: the eternal repetition of one's days.

Taqi, old friend, I've slid a long way from your notion of knowledge. Strange and unnatural punishment is where it's at now. Ought I to pray for forgiveness?

Just tell me what it is You want forgiven.
Reticent bastard, aren't You?
Listen, *please*: I apologize for being me. I'm sorry I am John Farrer. Deeply sorry.
But it seems that sorrow isn't enough.

Today the world stands still...
At first I didn't notice. I thought that the In-screen had simply stopped working.

But no. Everything has stopped, except for me. If I stay in the same place for too long, my own exhaled breath will asphyxiate me...

Mum stands motionless in the kitchen cubicle. A fly hangs in mid-air — and it isn't supported by any spider silk.

Outside, some way off, a police copter also hangs suspended; I can see each rotor blade as sharply as though it was parked on the ground.

Here is a single quantum moment of time, repeating itself over and over. I can move around in it, I alone, like somebody walking about in a holographic image — an image which is solid to the touch. It's a world in stasis. Is this the promised transcendental repetition, the eternal moment? Hardly, if my own waste gases stifle me!

Till that moment, though — till I become too weary to keep on the move — I can play with the world omnipotently! How can anything that I do be rewound now, when time itself stands still? The world is a toy, to be played with.

I guess I go a little crazy for the next few subjective hours. I break things. (The brick sails through the window, the glass erupts... then fails to fall down to the pavement.) I steal a sleek turbocar and drive around recklessly, careless of scrapes and bumps. I squash a stray dog into a red rug with my wheels. I presume that the turbocar functions normally because I'm connected to it; it's temporarily an extension of myself. I stop to set a fire in a bedding store. (The fire fails to burn. No doubt it would do so if I stood in it, consuming myself!) I stroll into a clothes store past the zombie guard. I inventory the young lady assistants, and choose one, and strip her and pose her acrobatically. (She does not awake, like Sleeping Beauty, at my caresses.) I screw her on the carpet, in Position Wow! of the *Kama Sutra*. She feels soft and warm, otherwise I suppose this would be necrophilia. I leave her poised, with my seed dripping from her. I notice a security copter stalled near a jeweller's. I steal their slug-rifle and blast holes in the sky. The trick now is to persuade time to flow on, not back! Despite the smog, the sky seems to stretch clear out to interstellar space. No holes appear in it; no painted scenery tumbles down.

And I'm being followed. I'm sure of it. Somewhere

in all this silent stasis of the world another engine buzzes. It buzzes for me.

Who is coming? Is it the milkman of knowledge? Far from me now the *Beagle*, the Tientsin meltdown, Donna Marquez of Peru...

I walk slowly around the turbocar. Keeping on the move. Ready to play statues.

Z-z-z-z...

A motorbike swings into view...

Freeze!

Perched on it is a young woman. Skinny, red hair, freckled face. She wears red slacks, red blouse, red boots. She's *fire*, coming to burn me! And I blush for my delinquencies. Is she another pre-incarnate, like me?

She brakes.

"Hi there!"

She's...joyful.

"Hey John, you can't fool me! Boys your age don't drive turbos." She laughs merrily. "Oh, I've seen your handiwork, but don't be shy...it's quite understandable."

"Who are you? Will I get rewound if I speak to you? What's been going on?" I'm crying. With relief. I'm a bubbling boy, ashamed of my tears.

"Hey, one thing at a time! I'm Liz. I've been trying to track you down. But every time I got close, you pulled a trick — and it was back to the start again, for both of us!"

She dismounts, and we walk round each other, adjusting our orbits to grab free, oxygenated space.

"I was in Celesteville, John. The same as you were. Stinky back here, isn't it?"

"Am I am criminal? A sinner? Why is this happening?"

She taps her nose wisely.

"You're a sort of time traveler — or maybe I should say a probability traveler. *They've* done this. *Them*. I don't know what they are: essences, entities that inhabit time or probability instead of space? They can stick their heads — or their feelers — through the surface of the world like you or I stick a glass-bottomed tube into a pond. What do the fish know about what's up at the other end?"

Superior entities. So. The idea of those is preferable to other explanations.

"Why has the world stopped?" I ask her. "Is the game over now? It seems such a silly game, this — just me and you...Liz. What are we: champions, representatives of the human race? *What's it all about?*"

"Johnny, there could be a billion alternative histories side by side. An infinite number of them. Maybe that's the kind of cosmos they inhabit. I just had to reach you. There was a time limit. Obviously it's up now. But," she grins, "here I am." She shakes her red mane free of CO₂.

"These 'entities'...I can't say that I noticed any back in 2090! Did anybody else notice them apart from you?"

"But we aren't from '90, John! We're from '95. That's the year when they intruded. They didn't give

(Continued to page 59)

Aeries

By Robert Reed

Art by Cortney Skinner

Scree woke cold and damp, feathers matted and his mouth sick to taste.

He stretched, rose, then slowly grew loose enough to move, waking his wife and the babies before he was done.

He said, "Sorry."

"It feels early," she answered.

"Go back to sleep."

"I doubt if I can."

The aerie was a cave, small and unit. The floor was mostly flat and carpeted with shed down and dried furs. The cave's mouth was partially walled with stones as large as Scree could manage, and through the gaps he and she could see the thick blue of the morning sky, chilled and with high clouds moving fast.

The babies were crying now, and too softly.

Their mother retched what she could to feed them; and Scree, watching, felt quicksilver emotions run through him. He had nothing to give. He was all bile and hunger himself. "Sorry," he swore, the word a quick clatter from his beak. Then she retched again, nothing coming, and the babies clambered up her with downy bodies too small and too slow to be right.

Said Scree, "You were talking last night."

She looked at him.

"As I was falling asleep."

Her eyes, large and golden, tore at him.

"Something about the Village," he said. "The Spacers." He spoke slowly; some words were graceless and large, plainly out of place. "You talked about a place, an aerie, where someone might help us."

She blinked and said, "You were listening," with an odd tone. "I thought you were sleeping."

"I was thinking," he confessed. "The Spacers might give us food. If I ask."

"So go." She looked at her poor children, lifting a leg and stroking their ragged down. "Forget what I was saying. Go and ask them." Her talons were long and black. He loved her talons for their elegance. He fiercely loved those golden eyes.

"Wish me good fortune," he said, having had none for ages.

"All you can bear," she offered.

"Wish me wind."

"Wind and wind," she wished, hopeful but not too.

He went out. Deftly, every motion practiced, he climbed over piled stones and stood on a ledge, preening a moment and summoning strength. Then he

curled and leaped and caught air in his wings; and the cliff rushed past for a long, long instant, and he flapped twice and struck a thermal and went soaring, circling high.

He felt old.

Ligaments, strained and tightly strung, complained under muscles torn and healed until tough and fibrous. Scree was old, and he resented his age nearly as much as he feared it.

He was high and gliding above the blue-black valley, the river shaking along and occasionally catching the light of the larger sun — what Spacers called Alpha A. There were clouds below, thick and thickening further, and he thought of how he had hunted that jungle for the last eleven days and gotten nothing for his trouble besides a couple of rotting corpses barely fit as food.

No, he decided. The Village was best. Go and find if there was a Spacer willing to be charmed.

Scree hugged the cliffs, slipping from one thermal to the next, and the air thinned and grew sharp and flight became work, his every small motion conscious and careful.

Eventually he topped the cliffs.

He was sliding over the burnt, ash-and-dust mesa. There should be animals in herds and animals alone, he thought. He could almost smell their stinks and hear the little thunder of their hooves. Some days, on good days, hunting was a simple business of picking a sick calf left behind by the herd. But this was a summer of enormous drought. Hot winds had parched the vegetation, and summer storms had only brought lightning and fires driven by the winds. The animals were gone. Starved, he knew, or crowded on some far pasture. It would be next year before the hunting returned to the mesa. If then. Sometimes Scree found himself wondering if he had made the right decision, vowing to keep their aerie and try to persevere.

Migration was no easy trick. Not on the best days.

It wasn't just distance or their hunger, he thought. It was a question of Scree's age and the young males he would have to compete against and somehow shoulder aside. For aerie space. For fresh-killed meat. And for possession of his wife...her looks sure to bring suitors while he is away hunting, and their offers of better lives...

Better to keep to the ground he knows.

If the family could survive until the autumn floods, somehow, then there would be plenty of carrion



in the valley. All for them. He flew through the morning and prayed to the Maker for such things to come true. The air thinned and chilled as he traveled, climbing, but worry and hope and a ragged faith all served to keep him strong enough to manage.

The Village was shiny in that Spacer way of things. Alpha A was high and brilliant, and the Red Moon was just visible, peeking over the long horizon — a partly-lit disc of mottled green and other with a single cap of ice much reduced. Summer was there, too, it seemed.

It was a queer place. Scree knew the Village well. As a child he had seen the Spacers drop in their ships and build it, pulling its parts miraculously from the stone of the mountains. He remembered his parents' concern about the place. The new Gray Moon, shiny and small, was full of Spacers; and the Red Moon was turning a sickly green under their care. The heavens were changing, and his parents had to wonder if these were omens. Was their world to be the next one transformed?

Scree landed at the edge of the Village, as was custom. He walked in, his gait slow and shuffling, his twin spines aching after the morning's work. The street was built with thick glass, pebbled and fogged and eternally warmed by fires Scree could not see or comprehend. The aerics where Spacers lived, cubic and regular, lined the street neatly and watched as he moved, their great glass eyes so square and clean.

He thought of the aerie his wife had mentioned...where there was help of some kind.

He saw Spacers walking and thought how they looked different from what he remembered. They looked new. Fashions in clothes and hair had changed, as fashions do, and that was what caught Scree's attention. But he didn't know what to make of what he saw. He stared and stared and felt a little lost on top of everything else.

One Person — a young male — was begging for food.

Mostly the Spacers paid no attention to him. Not a bit.

Once, years ago, several bachelors might have worked such a street and done well. But now, strangely, there was only one, and a hungry one at that: yellow eyes clouded and his feathers matted in a meatless way.

"Such a summer," said Scree, in passing.

The young male simply stared.

So Scree paused and remarked in a friendly way, "My aerie is a terrible distance from here. We don't see many Spacers and they're different from these." He asked, "Are there clues you can give? To help me earn a meal?"

But all the stranger would do was glare at him, the sickly eyes near blinking; and that was how, in the end, he drove Scree away.

When a child, Scree had not been allowed to enter the Village. But in winter and some summers his father would vanish for a time and return home with food — odd meats wrapped in odd glass, the glass pliable and layered.

When he was a child the only Spacers he knew were outcasts. Rarely, if ever, did they look like these Villagers. They seemed poor, living apart from one another in clumsy flying aerics, spending their days doing nothing but watching the People and the jungles and the high mesas.

Never, never did they give away meat; that was one certainty.

But sometimes, particularly when one of them had been alone for days and days, it would talk to a child and teach him a few things.

That was how Scree, as a bachelor, could live near the Village and do rather well for himself. He had been taught the language, and he knew a few tricks — ways of using his face, for instance, to mimic the odd Spacer expressions. And that was how he wasted a number of years of his life, begging and sleeping too much and not going about the business of finding a good home and wife.

Steeling himself against rejection, Scree approached a lone Spacer.

A raised leg and spread talons meant Friendship somehow.

He used a single Spacer word, "Ride," again and again, his clattering beak clumsy and out of practice.

But it wouldn't pause. It didn't even look his way. And when Scree persisted, it simply said, "Stop demeaning yourself," which was the same as saying nothing to Scree. He looked after it, puzzled, and made a cursing sound softly, careful to let no one hear.

Then he tried again. He found others.

"Tricks," he promised.

He said, "Loops," talons drawing circles in the thin air.

Finally he tried, "Holo," meaning he and they would pose in a variety of stances, and somehow they would capture their images inside clear slips of glass.

Only none of them showed interest. They snapped, "Go on! Get out of here!" the words flowing together so that Scree could scarcely understand the intent.

They were too busy, it seemed. Too rushed.

Or was it as some People claimed? Just last year, once or twice, Scree had heard that the Spacers were growing tired of the World. That the old tricks had suddenly lost their appeal.

The feel of the Village had certainly been transformed. A glance showed him that much. People were always People wherever you flew and on any day. But these creatures were so odd...changing their natures...not just clothing, thought Scree, but everything else as well.

What was acceptable yesterday was now a forbidden subject — for instance, feeding the People — and Scree asked himself how it must feel to be a Spacer, having to learn and relearn what is good and what is right.

There was no other Person on the street now. Just himself. And it suddenly occurred to him that no one would pay anything for anything he could do. Doomed to starve, he was, if he continued hoping for better. If he wanted food for his poor family he would have to hunt the jungle, damn his age and the season, or ignore his fears and move elsewhere.



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Move and risk the young males stealing what little was his.

He walked the street until he was out of the Village. Then he ran and flapped all four wings, leaping, getting airborne and turning and coming back over the Village. An enormous thermal pushed him higher, the heat from the streets smelling of Spacers. Alpha A blazed in the thin blue sky. The Red Moon laid motionless on the horizon, between distant peaks, and Scree thought of his wife again and remembered what she had said last night, in the dark, when she thought he was sleeping and she must have been speaking to herself.

There was a special aerie, hidden and remote. He didn't know how she had learned about it, but she had and he could halfway visualize where it stood.

Heading towards the Red Moon, Scree watched the mountain peaks and the high snow rivers curling through the valleys. He came very close to passing what he wanted, the ledge and opening nearly invisible in the vertical light. It had the view and feel of a true aerie. He came in for a few wary looks before landing, seeing no traces of People or Spacers and thinking that maybe it was abandoned. Maybe. Standing, his legs trembled with the cold and exhaustion. He studied the opening and a narrow glass path leading up inside, into the shadows, and finally, with a desperate sort of bravery, he stepped along the path until a massive door hissed and closed behind him.

Lights came on.

There was open space and the sense of rooms and long corridors branching back into the granite heart of the mountain.

"You've never been indoors, have you?"

Scree turned and saw a Spacer standing in a smaller doorway. It was a male, not old and not young, wearing one of those curious living furs that now were the fashion in the Village. The fur was gray-tipped with the blackest black near the roots, thick and luxurious, and where it thinned at the feet and grasping hands it became a snug, leather-colored layer of second skin — a living barrier against the world.

"Call me Jon," said the Spacer.

Scree blinked, amazed.

"Your name?" Jon asked. "What is it?"

Scree said it.

And Jon tried to repeat the sound. He worked at it, as if the name meant something to him, and after a minute he was satisfied with what he could do.

"Tell me about yourself," he then said. "About Scree."

Jon was a peculiar one. Scree couldn't recall any Spacer wanting to talk this way — besides the outcasts, that is, and he had assumed they were crippled with lonesomeness. Years ago, when he was young and gave rides every day, the Spacers were without exception unwilling or unable to talk at length with him. Oh, they would talk about him...particularly when they were in a group, excited by their adventures. But this one, Jon, was different, was strange, and it made Scree uneasy in ways he couldn't name.

"Have you an aerie?" asked Jon.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Nearby?"

"No." He pointed with a wingtip. "Quite far."

"Tell me —" He tried saying Scree's name. "— how did you learn so much of my language?"

As well as he could, Scree explained the outcasts.

"They sound like the old survey teams. Back during the inventory days." Jon nodded, speaking to himself. "I grew up reading about them, being jealous of them. Imagine. The country they saw is off-limits now. All of it reserved, for parks and for study."

Scree listened as well as he could manage.

And Jon suddenly took a piece of meat out from a lot in his fur — a neat cube wrapped and showing wonderfully blue through the wrapping — and he gave it to Scree and watched him pick apart the wrapping and eat it whole, never chewing, a certain look coming over Jon's watchful face.

"Family? Have you got one?"

Scree admitted that he did.

"A beautiful woman?"

Young, too. And smart. "Yes."

"And children?"

"Two." The meat was splendid. "Twins." Scree could already feel it flowing in his veins, bringing strength. "Sons."

"And your woman cares for them while you hunt." He took out more meat and laid it gently between them. "Judging by your expression, I'd guess that you don't quite know why you're here."

"What do you mean?"

"Eat, friend. Eat and tell me how you learned of this place."

Scree bolted down the food, crazy with joy, and told Jon about his wife talking nonsense to herself.

Later, after more questions and eating, they were standing in a long darkened room with machinery humming and the distinct smell of meat thick in the air. Jon said, "Bootleg meat," and laughed. "Do you know what I mean?"

Scree thought of boots and legs, not understanding.

"They say it's wrong and evil to feed you synthetic meats." Jon's voice was louder, full of color. "Imagine."

Scree sniffed, sucking up the wondrous odors.

"It's this new administration," said Jon. "The science-types. They got into the government and stopped the feeding. They made Home Base — Gray Moon, to you — shift the media to an anti-intrusion stance. 'Let the Blue World be.' That's what they say now. 'Flyers and mermaids and even dragon men deserve their lives, free of disturbance.'" He snorted and said, "Bunk!"

"It's a policy, friend. And policies change." He paused, then said, "Twenty years and you'll see it all change again. I swear. And they'll argue about this being best, or that, and they never asked you, did they? All you know is that no one's offering easy meals anymore. Am I right?"

He could see the mysterious machinery...

"Should I ask what I want to ask?" said Jon.

"Should I?"

...and he saw a pile of blue cubes, wrapped and

ready. A hundred easy meals, he realized. He spread his wings reflexively and began to beat them — the traditional gesture made after a great kill — and his stomach whined and his beak felt open, ready for a feast.

"Look at you," said Jon.

Scree scarcely heard him.

"You're splendid," Jon swore. He came straight at Scree, embracing him, pushing his face into the feathers on the breast and squeezing with all of his might. He said, "Feel yourself. God, you're a picture!" He said, "You feel just splendid...muscles and wings...damn!"

Scree narrowed his eyes, expecting a flash of light. He muttered, "Holo?"

"What?" Jon stiffened. "Oh, no! No, Friend. No holos." He said, "But there is something I'll tell you...something you can give me and be paid for...handsomely..."

Scree thought he understood. He felt Jon's grip and body, and he recalled stories in which some People made substantial treasures when they allowed Spacers certain privileges. Strange, haunting images came to mind. Then he blinked and breathed, surprising himself. Anything, he thought. Anything so long as the wondrous meat was his to take home.

Only he was wrong.

Jon suddenly broke away. He stood between the meat and Scree and spoke some crazy business about aeries and People and how things could be linked in some sophisticated way. Jon was concerned with Scree's suffering. He knew this had been a lousy year for People everywhere, the population inflated by years of eating synthetic meat and now the pastures burnt away and little left to hunt. Twins must be an enormous burden, he said. For anyone. The decent parent was the parent who would make sacrifices to ensure the survival of both his children...and again he mentioned aeries, telling Scree, "Think of it being like two People living together inside the same tiny cave."

"I don't understand."

"Of course not." He nodded his head. "It's hard. First you must think of your soul. And your body. Your body is home to your soul, you see. Do you see? That's its aerie."

Scree breathed deeply, concentrating.

"And sometimes we are born in the wrong bodies.

There are Spacers, many of them, who grow up knowing that they were always intended to be in the bodies of People. Winged and strong. Hunters high in the sky, and free. Do you understand?" He paused, then said, "This place serves those frustrated few. I own this place, and the scientists can't touch me. Not legally. Because any flyer, any Person like yourself, can come here freely and decide whatever he or she wishes. Do you understand?"

He couldn't.

"Suppose I was born in the wrong body." He pulled open the fur with one hard jerk, exposing a flat breast of chalky white skin. "I grow up seeing holos of you and your kind. I watch you ride the thermals and hunt and kill game with those talons, and I sit helpless — wingless, tool-using animal without a gram of splendor. Not a gram."

Scree waited, unsure what to think or say.

"You've got troubles, and I've got a solution." He nodded his head and told him, "Your soul, and my soul too, are things as real as can be. They live in our skulls. They can be moved and set wherever needed. Wherever is right." He paused, waving towards the humming machines. "You don't understand. I know. You're above this technology, and I think that's fine. Just fine." He said, "I'll tell you simply, it's like the way we make the blue meats. We can shape the tiniest parts of any substance into any shape and pattern we wish. For food or to reproduce souls, dear Scree."

He felt cold and frightened, a little, and when he breathed he smelled the meal all the more, the scent clotting his thoughts.

"I want to help," swore Jon. "You and your family and these friends of mine, too."

Scree was tired of standing.

"If you don't find help," said Jon, "neither of your children are going to grow into adults."

Which was true, thought Scree. Undeniable.

"And I don't mean to press you into decisions, but their age is critical. Youth is what makes my magic possible. The mind is more plastic when it's new. That makes the grafting infinitely easier." He eased backwards, standing beside the blue stack. "Whatever you decide, I'll pay you for your time and trouble." His face showed teeth, and he promised, "Accept my offer and I'll make enough of this," his hands full of cubes, "so you'll never want for anything again. Ever."

Scree watched, amazed, while Jon threw the meat at him. For him. He couldn't help himself, pulling off the wrappings and then gulping down one after another. But soon a sloppy second pile was around his feet. And again, reflexively, he began beating the air with his wings.

"Look at you," said Jon. "Yes!"

He was beside Scree, flapping those ludicrous arms and pretending, his bare face full of color and his eyes bright and dancing.

"Look at us!" he said, giggling.

Then Jon gave a piercing call — a Person's victory call — his voice too small and very wrong, yet the spirit, somehow, in some strange sideways fashion, true.

Then it was late, dusk long gone, and Scree was home in the aerie with a feast stretched up on the floor and steaming.

"Such luck," claimed his wife, happier than in years. "So much good meat. We'll all be fat by morning."

There could be more, he thought. Provided they allowed it—

"How did you earn so much?" she wondered, eyes wide.

Enough for a long old age, and maybe for their children's own children, too.

"Darling," she said, eating and eating. "Isn't it marvelous? Love? What are you thinking?"

"It's marvelous."

"You aren't happy?"

"I'm happy."

"Don't lie. I know you."

"What do you know?"

She said nothing. She quit eating, sat and stared at him.

He couldn't stay indoors. He climbed out of the aerie and perched on the ledge, listening to the night sounds.

In time, carefully, his wife joined him.

He avoided her gaze.

"The children are sleeping," she reported, watching him.

He began to preen, every motion furious and exact; and then he heard himself explaining, frustrated. He described what had happened, using words to capture what he felt inside.

His wife responded him, saying and doing nothing. She merely sat and listened, her expression never more patient.

"Afterwards," he said, "I asked Jon what would happen to him. If I brought one of them, that is. And he promised that two souls could be merged into one...that nothing would be lost from either one...that they would grow up in one body and share memories of their past, only I forget the reasons..."

She said, "A Spacer wants to be a Person."

"Jon would keep our boy in that home of his, caring for him. He's done it to many others before, or so he claimed."

She was breathing softly.

"He's promised food for us. Mountains of food."

He had expected some reaction, something definite, but she was utterly passive. A stranger, nearly. He asked what she thought, hearing the story, and she asked him what he believed they should do.

"Nothing." He breathed, smelling the cooling rocks and jungle. "What else can we do? Choose a

son? Give him away without a fight?"

She fidgeted, saying nothing.

"Tonight, flying home, I thought about it all," he said. "I reminded myself how the Spacers change their minds every day. About what they wear, their customs, and even the color of their world," motioning to the unseen Red Moon. "A Spacer becomes a Person. What then? What about our son? Suppose the Spacer inside him decides being a Spacer is really better? Or being a dragon man? Or a mermaid?" Scree maintained, "You don't know them. Not like I know them. Spacers need comfort and easy living, and they can't be expected to serve their family if they're starving. Or injured. Or when their luck is bad."

She shifted, then sat motionless. Her eyes showed something—

"I've had enough of them on my back, riding me, to know what I'm telling you. They're small and weak and couldn't be trusted with our son's poor soul. Believe me!"

She made a sound, brief and fierce. Suddenly she was standing, slashing at Scree with her fine long talons. He stumbled and fell. The ledge was underneath him and then gone, and he was tumbling through the whistling air. It took him an age to pull away from the cliff, flying, too stunned to think as he climbed up into the darkness, settling on the ledge with no one to greet him or slash at him. Everyone indoors.

He waited for a time, thinking.

Then he said, "All these years," once he saw the truth; and he sat thinking about his wife and everything he had thought he had known; and the wind came up and played over his body and wings and the dry cleaned feathers that were freshly preened.

— ABO —

Our Alien Publisher

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page 6

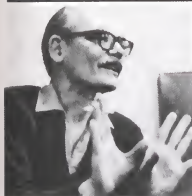
a court appearance. Mega Mutual has never looked into the cost of training its supervisors to be fair, honest, and consistent with their employees. (It wouldn't matter if it had. Mega Mutual could have the best supervisors in the world, but they would not be able to protect the company from a certain group of human beings that makes a profession of getting fired from large companies.)

If all of this is true for

business, it goes double for politics. In politics, the further you can distance yourself from your mess, the higher the level to which you can aspire in the public's estimation. If you read the Oliver North biography, you will see that people who can put significant distance between themselves and their messes are presidential material. Here, the action usually moves too fast to ever get into the courts. Or, more appropriately, the trials are held in the public forum of the television news. (In 14 years, when the most recent transmissions arrive at our planet, you will see that no amount of pine cleaner or denture cream can preserve your candidacy for public office if you are caught spending the night with the winner of a hot body contest.)

Those who admit to responsibility for mistakes or bad judgment are despised in human society. The righteousness of the command to clean up your own mess is not enough to overcome the indignity of being seen doing it. That is why a human being will always refuse to accept responsibility for a mess or will, in taking the blame for it, insist that it's not a mess at all but activity in the public interest or self-sacrifice to the cause of posterity. Certain people who somehow capture the public imagination (presidents, senators, congressmen, business executives) can maintain wealth, power, and influence in spite of a veritable closetful of messes — provided they never own up to making them.

— ABO —



Chernobyl and Challenger:

That Was the Year That Was

By Frederik Pohl

When I talk about science fiction (which I do, a lot) it's useful to say what it is I'm talking about. The definition of the stuff that I think is most useful is "Science fiction is stories about things that might actually happen."

Some people object to that definition. They say the trouble with it is that it takes in so much that, for example, all of mainstream literature becomes only a sort of subset of science fiction. I don't disagree with that statement. I only don't see it as a trouble.

I would be tempted even to go a little farther. Since science fiction is often about the future, and since all of us, every minute, are advancing another sixty seconds into that future, I could even be persuaded to claim that unfolding reality itself is only a somewhat different subset of the general set of science fiction. I don't claim that often — because I don't like the idea of people coming to take me away — but I do sometimes view things like Chernobyl and Challenger — and indeed much of what happens every day — as a kind of science fiction.

What I object to is that it isn't very good science fiction. It lacks plausibility. You'd never get away with it in a science-fiction story, because nobody would believe it.

For example, let's look at space travel, specifically the space shuttle.

The space shuttle is a pretty implausible reality. It starts with an airplane that doesn't fly very well. It can't lift itself, so you have to strap heavy-duty solid-fuel boosters onto it. It can't even maintain level flight. All it can do

is land, and you have to do that on the first pass because you don't get a second.

The shuttle is an extraordinarily complicated machine with many thousands of individual parts. Any of them can fail. In a lot of cases a failure is only trouble, not necessarily disaster, because there are backup parts and systems that can substitute for them. But there are a lot of parts that don't have any backups. These are called "Criticality One" items, meaning that if one of them fails the ride is over, and there are eight hundred Criticality One items on each shuttle. One man I know who worked on developing the shuttle in the early stages describes it as a "Polish bomber," which is to say a bomber with the bomb bays on top. Those "bomb bays" are very big, big enough to hold some huge, complex satellites, mostly belonging to the Department of Defense. They're too big for the size of the shuttle itself. But the shuttle can't be made much bigger than it is, because the present weight of the assemblage is already pushing the limits of what can be lifted by the number of solid-fuel boosters that can reasonably be strapped onto it.

I won't even talk about the problems with the brakes, or with the heat-resistant tiles; or about the magnolious promises that were made when they sold us this turkey about how many flights could be launched every year and how cheap putting payloads into space was supposed to become. I won't even dwell on the fact that the shuttle soaked up so much of our space budget that almost everything else got put on hold,

though that's a whole sorry story in itself. I'll just mention that even if everything goes exactly right, if none of the eight hundred Criticality One items goes sour and the launch is successful, all you achieve is Low Earth Orbit — which is to say, you've taken only the very first step on the long and difficult climb into the vastness of space.

We did all that so very much better in science fiction.

It is true that there are certain technical difficulties in the way of using science fiction's spaceship drives in reality — for example, the fact that, as far as we know, none of them exist.

But, if you could swallow the assumption that they did exist, then the things that they did in the stories became pretty plausible. You could actually believe that someone might jump into his spaceship, turn the ignition key, take off and start having adventures.

But you certainly can't do that with a shuttle, and what is so utterly implausible about reality is that NASA appears to have spent a lot of time trying to pretend that you could. It's true that the shuttle flights carried a good many communications satellites, military satellites and scientific experiments. They also carried hyped-up public relations shows designed to "prove" the validity of some of the Star Wars weaponry; they carried schoolboy science projects; they carried a couple of Congressmen, an occasional *au pair* crew member from Canada or Mexico, an Arab prince and, at the tragic

(Continued to page 52)

Frenchmen and Plumbers

By Martha Soukup

Art by Pat Morrissey

Sally Tobias rubbed the back of her hand across her itchy, sweaty brow, conscious of the motion, trying to ignore the soft whir of the video camera high in a corner of her workroom. The gesture left streaks of clay blended with the early gray in her dirty-blond hair. More water for the clay: she scooped some out of the urn at her ankle. At least there was water here, along the Rio Grande; nothing you would even use to wash your hair without distilling, but good enough for the pots, and certainly more than could be had in her native Phoenix, where the water table had given out not long after she left. And she liked the isolation of northern New Mexico, along the river, between the mountains, and far from most of the humans who had mucked up the planet.

That isolation couldn't last. The economy was breaking down now, too. People with more love for cities than she now sought other homes, independence from the system that was choking itself. Stoppag measures, of course.

She was finally isolated again. The scientists who had milled and buzzed around her little cabin for most of the last week had faded away, leaving her head milling and buzzing with instructions and admonitions.

"Be ready Tuesday," one had said.

"What time?"

"Anytime." He paused. "We can't seem to get a straight translation of time from them. But we're pretty sure it will be Tuesday."

"You might not want to go to bed Monday night, though," said another.

It was late Tuesday, the sun touching a mountain-top to the west; she had not slept and no alien had appeared. Sally finished shaping a pot, tall and narrow, its sides twisting up like a growing thing. She might be able to sell it. What little money she had came from the pots and tiles stacked on her front porch; a tourist or a refugee sometimes gave her a dollar or two for one. With this she kept her supply of glazes stocked and bought the few essentials she needed to supplement her garden. Occasionally she sent some of the remainder to the Cavalry Fund.

She had put little faith in the project. Pulling a few remaining resources together, in slender hope of contacting an alien race detected scant years before? Might as well stare at a star and wish the rain forests back, pesticides vanished from the food chain, all the radioactive waste magically decayed away. Better to

make her pots, her tiles, her wind-flutes, bring a little last beauty to her corner of the earth. She didn't believe in God, either — but she found herself praying every night.

But the Cavalry had come. They wanted to talk.

"Why me?" she had asked.

"We don't know. They've been here two weeks and they still keep claiming not to understand what our problem is. What our problem is!" the scientist cried, and quieted her voice again when another looked at her sternly. "— They said they wanted to talk to some other types of humans. We showed them the Fund's subscription list. They selected one hundred and eighty-seven names — apparently at random — and said they'd talk to those people this Tuesday. We think."

"Are there two hundred aliens?"

"No, there are fourteen of them."

"So will I be able to talk to them? How?"

"We think so. Projections, duplicates — there are so many things we don't understand. So many things the Cavalrans can do that make no sense at all." An awkward name, but it had stuck. Sally was not to call them that, or address them by any name; she was not to bring up international conflicts, unless the alien did; she was not to ask any questions; she was not to volunteer anything. The linguists, psychiatrists and diplomats off the Fund did not want any well-meaning amateurs disrupting their careful procedures. She was just to answer the questions she was asked as honestly and simply as she could. As were, presumably, the other hundred and eighty-six.

She set the pot on a shelf to dry, and went to another shelf where a wind-flute was cooling. She glanced through her back window: it was closed, but she could just hear, if she listened, the soft whistling of the wind-flutes hanging from her tree. The tree bore dozens of flutes, all shaped and colored differently, and as the wind blew through them they swung and sang. Her flutes were not for sale: they were Sally's personal patch of beauty in the ugly mess people had made of the world.

The new one should be cool enough; she touched it with a fingertip, then picked it up. It was glazed green, a vivid emerald. So little green left in the world. The door opened behind her. She didn't turn immediately; she spun the piece slowly in her hands, looking for any

(Continued to page 48)



BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer



Books Versus Careers

Like most writers, I think, I study careers. Some of this is just self-protection — learning to avoid the mistakes of our predecessors without presuming to claim their virtues. For instance, Arthur Machen, the great horror writer, author of *The Three Impostors* and *The Hill of Dreams*, suffered the singular tragedy of not being discovered by critics or readers until his talent had long since fled. He outlived his own genius by forty years. But he dug his own grave a bit deeper when the editors of major magazines finally solicited stories from him. He demanded commissions, all stories bought sight unseen. Was this to hide the fact that he *knew* he couldn't write very well anymore, or was he just too scarred by past rejections? Needless to say, the editors stopped asking.

Then one thinks of H.P. Lovecraft, poor as a church-mouse, spending most of his time writing letters, refusing to compromise his fiction by slanting it to commercial standards, sacrificing many sales as a result. The right thing? Yes and no. If he'd written more conventionally, he would have made more money, but his work might not have been any more distinguished than that of say, Arthur J. Burks or Seabury Quinn. The whole history of the fantasy field might have been dif-

ferent, when you consider what Lovecraft *inspired* — the entire fantasy specialty-press field, beginning with Arkham House, which paved the way for science-fiction specialty books, which showed commercial publishers that a SF audience existed.

Then one thinks of the writers who somehow *lost it*, like the late Stanton Coblenz, who was one of the biggest names in the field in 1935, and who continued to publish original novels into the late 1960s, but whose career was effectively over by 1940. When John Campbell turned science fiction around in the pages of *Astounding* about that time, Coblenz and many other greats of the day failed or refused to be retrained, and were pushed further and further into the fringes. There's a very subtle lesson there. I imagine Coblenz continued to produce what he considered to be true and right, but suddenly it just wasn't good enough.

All these career studies aren't depressing, I hasten to add. We can only be inspired by Jack Williamson, who started with *Gernsback* in 1928 and has always managed to be good enough in each succeeding decade.

One of the superficial conclusions you reach is that most writers have a good ten years, in which they show what they can do. Afterwards, the essential creation over, there is repetition, refinement, or (in Machen's case) decline. Ray Bradbury wrote everything his reputation depends on between about 1943 and 1953. Everything since is

judged by the standards of that decade and often found wanting. Robert Heinlein had about thirteen good years, just before World War II (1939-41) and the decade of the 1950s. Since then he's largely gone from disaster to disaster, his few successful books (*The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, *Friday*, and *Job*) being perceived in terms of his earlier work, as partial returns to form.

Yet this model is too simplistic. Heinlein is still trying to grow as a writer. At age 80, he's reaching out in new directions. (I'll review his new novel, *To Sail Beyond the Sunset*, next issue.) I'm sure Bradbury doesn't see his own career the way I've described it.

So the fascination of all this is that sometimes a writer's career becomes an entity in itself. Sometimes the writer gets trapped by critics' or readers' expectations, or just how much money the publishers want to fling around. Sometimes he leads his career. Sometimes it drags him by the nose.

The most obvious form of dragging is *sequelitis*. This is a familiar enough phenomenon in the movie industry. Something sells, so everybody wants *more of the same*. Publishers get a best-seller and demand the same, or pay so much for it that the writer can't afford to do otherwise. Frank Herbert was trapped this way in the last decade of his life. And I think Isaac Asimov is trapped that way now.

I'm not so sure about Frederik Pohl. His career doesn't fit the common pattern. He's one of the master survivalists in SF. But let's look at one of his new

RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Very good
★★★	Good
★★	Fair
★	Poor

books, the worst case of sequelitis I've seen in a long time:

The Annals of the Heechee

By Frederik Pohl
Del Rey Books, 1986
352 pp. \$16.95

First there was *Gateway* (1977), which has become a modern classic. Then two sequels, *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon* (1980) and *Heechee Rendezvous* (1984), neither of which measured up to the original, mostly because they tended to expose more and more of the mystery of the alien Heechee and their fantastic machines to the light of day.

But these books sold, not quite on *Dune* levels, but well enough that it seems that we

they've been doing all this time. After that, vestiges of plots and subplots wave around like strands of seaweed, and there's very little tension, for all the universe is saved and we witness a cosmic battle right out of 1930s super-science. (Of course Pohl does it better, or more literately anyway, and I'm sure he'd admit that these books have their roots in the super-science sagas he read as a kid, that peculiar breed which flourished in the Tremaine *Astounding* for just a few years and is typified by John Campbell's *The Mightiest Machine*.)

The result is that the expository sections are more interesting than the narrative. They're at least based on the very latest cosmology and intellectually exciting. But, alas, the mysterious Heechee are now "just plain folks" and even the dread Foe (who aspire to do nothing less than remake the entire universe to their liking) are a bit of a flash in the pan.

Fortunately for Pohl, his career is still going strong, and *The Annals of the Heechee* is but an isolated departure from form.

Rating: ☆½

Now let's look at another writer who really must feel haunted by his career:

The Folk of the Air

By Peter S. Beagle
Del Rey Books, 1986
330 pp. \$16.95

Peter Beagle is, on the basis of a mere two novels and two shorter works, one of the unimpeachably great American fantasists. A *Fine and Private Place* and *The Last Unicorn* rank with *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, *Jurgen*, *The Incomplete Enchanter*, and a couple of others at the pinnacle of the genre in this country.

But maybe the career model here is Charles Finney, who did other things with his life after *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, and even wrote a couple of other good books, but could never Do It Again.

Quite possibly, even if he had created something else equally great and unique, the readers

would not have recognized it. This may be one of the factors that drives an Asimov or a Herbert into churning out *More Of The Same*.

I admit I had unrealistic expectations for this book, because, for all he's worked in other fields, Beagle has effectively written nothing of importance since 1968, when *The Last Unicorn* came out. Times have changed. Beagle has changed. We readers have changed. So it's entirely impossible to recreate the delicate chemistry that made *The Last Unicorn* what it was, and that, I am sure, is what most people, possibly even the author himself, wanted. It must be scary to be in such a position. Maybe that is why it took Beagle nearly 18 years to

PETER S. BEAGLE

THE LAST UNICORN

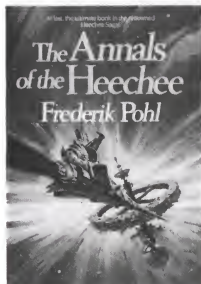


THE
FOLK
OF THE
AIR

finish The Folk of the Air.

But, quite frankly, I think he would have had a better book if he'd finished it in three. A younger Beagle would have been able to sweat a hundred pages out of this thing without loss. It is a good book, sure, but not at all a great one. Its flaws are poor organization, so that the viewpoint character doesn't so much participate in the story as wander through parts of it, and plain old padding. It's much too slowly paced and comes perilously close to being dull for long stretches.

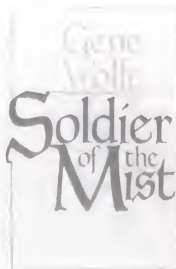
Its virtues are another matter. What Beagle's done here is taken an old fan-fiction cliché and done it right, with a professional's competence and intelligence. The



publisher has demanded an artistically unnecessary sequel, even though Pohl has nothing more to say. At least I hope that's what happened, because I can't otherwise imagine Fred Pohl writing something as flabby and self-indulgent as *The Annals of the Heechee*.

It's hardly a novel at all. Think of it as an appendix, rather like those appendices in the back of *The Return of the King* which explain what happened to everybody after the story was over. The first hundred pages are (shades of late Heinlein) a convention, in which the characters from the previous books (including many of the dead ones) get together to chat about how

cliche is: *What if the mock-magic and play-combat of groups like the Society for Creative Anachronism suddenly became real?* Beagle has used this as a springboard to something more subtle, springing off with polished prose, memorable characterizations, and malicious wit. (I particularly like the lady in the costume "wearing a huge Elizabethan farthingale that made her look as if she were smuggling washing machines" and the wry note at the height of what has become a serious battle: "The castle seethed and rocked like a subway car at rush hour.") He addresses serious themes of reality and illusion and what might be called the abuse of personality.



If *The Folk of the Air* were a first novel, we'd say it's pretty good and the writer shows a lot of promise, but, this being the first Beagle book in 18 years, something seems missing.

Rating: ☆☆☆

And now, a writer who seems to glide miraculously onward:

Soldier in the Mist
By Gene Wolfe
Tor Books, 1987
335 pp., \$15.95

I think the whole field has benefited by the fact that Gene Wolfe went full-time quite late. Sure, he might have written more otherwise, but by not being dependent on his writing for a liv-

ing for so many years, he has come to be more intensely devoted to his craft that just about anyone else. Wolfe tries to do things *right* and he seems to produce what he wants to, not what the market demands. Who else would follow up the huge success of *The Book of the New Sun* with something as eccentric as *Free Live Free*? (Well, lots of people, many of them partially unpublished. A happy balance has been reached. Wolfe can do something that eccentric and sell the result.)

I interviewed Gene for the special Gene Wolfe issue of the revived *Weird Tales*. We talked about *Soldier of the Mist* a lot, and one of the things that most impressed me was that he had actually gone to the trouble of learning ancient Greek just to write this novel (which contains very few Greek words). Why? Because, he said, you have to if you're going to write about ancient Greece and do it *right*.

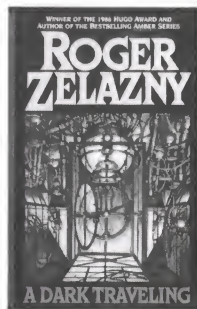
Soldier of the Mist plays games with the whole concept of a fantasy novel. To us it is clearly fantasy. The gods appear. A necromancer raises the dead and later transforms himself into a woman. Prophecies work. But what Wolfe is actually doing is presenting a real historical setting (Greece, 479 B.C., right at the end of the Persian War) as the people of the time saw it. To them, the supernatural was a part of everyday life. There is nothing in this book that a Greek of the time would find implausible.

And he twists language around to heighten the effect. To the Greeks, the place names were not exotic words, but familiar ones which meant something. So we read of cities named Peace, Rope, and Thought, and such places as The Hot Gates, Good-cattle Island, and The Long Coast.

The story concerns a mercenary soldier who, because of a head wound, has only one day's worth of memory. So, every day he must write what he has experienced on a scroll, then read the scroll the next morning. Every day he must rediscover who he is.

One assumes this cannot go on for too many volumes, or the poor fellow will spend all his time reading. But in the meantime he has fantastic experiences (he, uniquely, can see the gods on a regular basis) and lives in the mist of forgetfulness. He can never be sure that what is written is the truth. Once, to throw us all for a loop, Wolfe has the self-serving necromancer write a chapter.

As you might expect from Wolfe, this is a beautifully written, subtle book. It does show his one serious flaw, too, his inability to maintain tension. Beauty and subtlety do not preclude tension. I need only point to *Moby Dick* or *Hamlet*. The narrative does tend



to ramble, and we, like the befuddled hero, don't often feel much urgency. But there is *wonder* here, of being made to see a completely new place in a new way.

Look for this one on the award ballots.

Rating: ☆☆☆

And, speaking of books versus careers:

A Dark Traveling
By Roger Zelazny
Walker & Co., 1987
143 pp. \$14.95

Here's a pure example of a

book that would seem a lot better if written by John Doe. If you, like me, fell suddenly in love with Zelazny's work in the late '60s, when he seemed to represent the absolute cutting edge, you are, perhaps unfairly, hoping for another *This Immortal* or *The Dream Master* or "A Rose for Ecclesiastes." But of course times and people do change, and the Zelazny of 1987 can no more write like the Zelazny of 1967 than I can. He is not that person anymore. And at the same time, maybe you've had those sneaking suspicions about the Golden Age of SF being, if not 12, then at least Youth, and you wonder if that early Zelazny was really as good as remembered. (I've gone back and checked. The answer is yes.)

In any case, Zelazny just doesn't seem as exciting anymore. Now *A Dark Traveling* is admittedly a minor work, a juvenile written especially to fit this new Walker line of illustrated novellas. It's quite polished, save for occasional grammatical lapses I choose to blame on the copy editor. If pulp fiction had been this well written, there would have been no need to stage revolutions against it.

We have the familiar Zelazny device of the charming first-person narration by a decidedly odd narrator, in this case a young werewolf whose parents are members of a league of guardians of the portals between parallel timelines. There's a trans-temporal war going on. The hero, his witch sister, and other characters have to find missing parents and perform a daring mission.

And it all comes off slickly, with little conviction. The serious failure here is to characterize the bad guys at all, the whole culture of evil "darkbanders," whose evil we have to take the author's word for, and the black magician, whose presence is so crucial at the climax. He's no more than a walk-on, his personality supplied with one or two of the broadest strokes.

It all seems rushed, with loose ends dangling for sequels.

Rating: ☆☆

Noted:

The Net

By Loren J. MacGregor
Ace, 1987
225 pp. \$2.95

This is one of the late Terry Carr's new series of Ace Specials. Carr had a genius for picking special books. His initial series of Specials gave us *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Picnic on Paradise*, *Rite of Passage*, and others. The new series, consisting entirely of first novels, has given us *Neuromancer*.

And now it's given us *Loren J. MacGregor*. Note emphasis. I do not think this novel is going to be



a deathless classic, but the author is an interesting find. *The Net* is baroque space opera, clearly derivative of Samuel R. Delany — but don't let that scare you; I mean the bright images, exotic characters, and mild sexual fetishism of *Nova* or *The Einstein Intersection*, not the tortured syntax and emptiness of *Dhalgren*.

It's an above-average novel, no more than that. The author needs to learn a few things about craft, particularly how to control point of view. His continual slips are especially disastrous in a multiple-viewpoint novel. But the impressive thing is that *this is his*

first published fiction.

A writer to watch. His next book may be really special.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship

By Gary K. Wolfe
Greenwood Press, 1987
162 pp. \$35.00

This one will end up almost exclusively in reference libraries, where it will have a curious effect on critical thinking about the genre. The work consists primarily of a glossary of terms, everything from *science fiction* (pages of definitions) to *chronotope* (a bit of thick academic dialect; I'm not sure I understand even the commentary on it), with, in general, intelligent and perceptive explanations of what the word means and how it was derived. I'm particularly amused to note that *sci fi* is coming to mean something that resembles Science Fiction, but isn't good enough to be Science Fiction. As such, the term is genuinely useful. The book itself is useful, as long as we remember that these terms, like the concepts they represent, are fluid things, not to be encased in amber for all time.

And it's yet another sign of the continuing respectability of Science Fiction that such a book would be published at all.

Rating: ☆☆☆

-ABO-





ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

NASA Experiments With SF

Science fiction writers and artists are always game for a little experimentation. Some of them will be helping NASA with an experiment in interactive television in October that you can also be part of. More details later in this column.

Frederik Pohl is again an ABO contributor with an essay titled "Chernobyl and Challenger: That Was the Year That Was."

His new book *Chernobyl: A novel*, (Bantam Books) has been getting good reviews and sold out its first printing a month before

future and meeting with Larry Schiller and J.P. Miller, the team that wants to produce and write a miniseries from *Chernobyl*.

Our cover art is by Leslie



Howard V. Hendrix

Pardew, who is making his second appearance in ABO.

Pardew and his family just made their official appearance in Provo, Utah. They moved there from Philadelphia, where Pardew was the animation director for Animation Arts Associates.

Pardew has opened a Provo studio that specializes in film and video production for corporate, industrial and promotional uses, and also offers a wide range of commercial art.

His cover art illustrates the story by Howard V. Hendrix titled "Doctor Doom Conducting," about the handiwork of a madman.

Hendrix, sometimes known as Xavier Bux, has a bachelor's degree in biology and just got his Ph.D. in English from the Uni-

versity of California, Riverside.

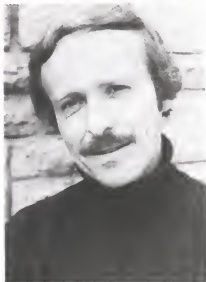
He sold a story titled "The Rasta Man" to *Leading Edge* in 1986 and is in the process of selling his novel, *Building the Ruins*.

He's just finished a story called "A Tale of Two Avatars" and is working on his second novel, *Laws for Falling Bodies*.

Hendrix has a wife named Laurel (nice name) and says he likes being a hell-raiser. He was recently among the protestors at the Nevada nuclear weapons test site and at the ballistic missile office at Norton Air Force Base.

He says his pet loves are "provoking thought in the non-thinking, dealing crippling blows to my own preconceptions and engaging in vigorous debate."

British author Ian Watson brings us "The Milk of Knowledge,"



Ian Watson



Leslie Pardew

the official August publication date.

Pohl, who did much of his research for the novel in the USSR, was back there in early September, attending a conference on science fiction and the

a story which corroborates my own theory that most brilliant men were once very naughty little boys.

Watson, who has his master's degree in English Literature from Oxford, says he started writing science fiction as a "psychological survival mechanism."

His first horror novel is just out. *The Power*, published in the U.K. by Headline, is about U.S. bases in Britain, nuclear war, rural life



Bob Eggleton
with ASFA Award

and ancient evil.

His next book, for Grafton in the U.K. is titled *Whores of Babylon* and is due out next year.

Watson has a wife named Judy, who is an artist and craftsperson, and he says his favorite hobby is "drinking real ale." (*Amen!* — *Ed.*)

Watson says he recently discovered the answer to jet lag. He took a sensory deprivation tank trip in San Francisco then applied the mind state he had achieved there to a 10-hour plane flight.

Bob Eggleton, who illustrated "The Milk of Knowledge" is just as busy with SF conventions and art assignments as he was when he contributed a dazzling cover to ABO's last issue.

Eggleton was recently awarded first place for "Best Magazine Cover" by ASFA (Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists) for a cover he did for *Isaac Asimov's* magazine in 1986.

He was also given a cover reference in Byron Preiss's *The Universe* for "capturing the



Robert Reed

essence of a supernova."

Author Robert Reed says he took some graduate level studies in ecology. I thought so after reading his tale "Aeries" which gives a twist to the concepts of an ecological niche, and man's ability to subvert nature.

Reed's first novel, *The Leeshore* (Donald I. Fine Inc.) came out in April, and his second novel, with the same publisher, is called *The Hormone Jungle* and is due out in March of next year.

Reed says he likes beaver skulls and running long-distance races. He lives in the heart of the Midwest, Lincoln, Nebraska, but recently traveled to New York City.

From his account of the trip, it sounds like he easily adapted to the New York style. Reed says he witnessed an arrest, rode the subway, and "shot withering looks at strangers."

I discovered something that Reed and Hendrix have in common. They both got their start by winning awards and having stories published by *Writers of the Future*, which recently announced it was extending its contest for another year.

Artist Courtney Skinner illustrated "Aeries." Skinner's hobby, researching and portraying the life of an 18th century itinerant artist, led to unexpected profit recently.

He was hired by a private school in Cambridge, Mass. to teach young children the art of 18th century silhouette cutting.

Skinner says the classic artists of that era have greatly influenced his own work. He is especially taken by the drawings classic artists made as preliminaries to paintings. They were called "cartoons" and were never displayed.

Emily Devenport, who made her first short story sale with "Shade and the Elephant Man" in our fourth issue, returns with "Skin Deep."

Devenport creates an unforgettable character in the war dog, Puke. She says the story was inspired by a real dog, Patches, "an orphan who has (unfortunately) lived with us for two years."

Devenport says Patches likes to lie under her feet while she works at the typewriter. She says Patches doesn't look anything like the wardog — she wears a perpetually goofy expression and has a head too small for her body, but Patches does share Puke's, um, malodorous tendencies.

Devenport and fiancé Ernest Hogan took a bus trip to Mexico in June. She says she got to see Diego Rivera murals up close and the experience was "overwhelming."



Emily Devenport

The photo of her was taken at Teotihuacan, just outside of Mexico City, "halfway between the Pyramid of the Sun and the Avenue of the Dead," she says.

The art for "Skin Deep" was done by camera-shy artist Wendy-Snow Lang.

Wendy is illustrating a re-issue

(Continued to page 55)

An Unfiltered Man

By Robert A. Metzger

Art by Larry Blamire

Black and spongy. Five bristling hairs poked from its center. A wart. Even though I had a great distrust of warts, I tried to keep an open mind, hoping that this one might exhibit some shred of social decency. I doubted it, though.

"Allen," said Nurse Bemeyer, "this is Dr. Christoffer."

To say the least, I was surprised. I'd encountered many warts throughout my travels, but few that had names, and fewer still that were doctors. This did not look good. Warts were generally bad enough, but experience had long ago taught me to rank doctors at least three notches below a wart. Facing a wart bestowed with a medical degree left me with little hope that this would be a pleasant encounter. I prayed that it wasn't a specialist.

"Pleased to finally meet you," said the wart.

I never saw its lips move when it spoke. Actually, I never even saw its lips. I grudgingly had to admit to myself that this might be a wart that was a cut above the norm. It was then that I realized what the tricky little growth was up to. It was using the body that was attached to it to do its talking. This was pretty damn impressive even for a wart that had remained unscathed after four years of medical school. I realized in an inspirational flash that the wart wanted to remain incognito, and pass off the body growing from it as the real Dr. Christoffer. It hadn't fooled me, but I'd go along with the charade until I found out what its real plans were.

My eyes decided to focus on the creased, white bearded face that was masquerading as Dr. Christoffer. His little brown eyes were sunk deep behind rimless bifocals. A roadmap of crisscrossed veins covered his red nose and cheeks. This is not a face I would have chosen, but of course there's no accounting for taste when you're dealing with something from the medical profession.

"I hope I will be able to help you," said Dr. Christoffer.

I was momentarily confused. I rarely get confused. Then I realized what Dr. Christoffer was referring to. It's amazing how the little things can slip your mind. I was insane.

Something grabbed my left hand and pumped it vigorously. The grasp was moist. I was not surprised. I'd expect the handshake of a wart to be moist.

"What do you say?" asked Nurse Bemeyer.

"Albacore tuna," mumbled my mouth. I have no

idea why my mouth said that. It's not very intelligent. Perhaps it was hungry again. If the damn thing wasn't drooling, it was eating. I don't know why I brought it along with me.

Nurse Bemeyer and Dr. Christoffer smiled. Maybe they liked tuna. Perhaps my mouth wasn't the fool I had always thought it was. It might not be a bad idea to listen to it more often.

Dr. Christoffer's moist fingers slipped from my hand. It was only as his little finger was just sliding away that I felt the hunger, and I'm not talking about tuna cravings. Evil ate deep within him. Squirmy worms munched his small intestine in their quest for soft lymph nodes. My mouth seemed to like the doctor, and even though it wasn't the most intelligent organ I had, it was usually a pretty good judge of character. I tossed aside my distrust of warts with medical backgrounds, and reaching with my third hand, the one that only my third eye could see, I reached into Dr. Christoffer's saggy paunch. I picked out every last one of those cancerous worms, and hurled them to hell. I think it was hell. It might have been Pittsburgh.

"Oh!" said Dr. Christoffer. He grabbed his stomach, then sighed deeply. Pain which had lurked in the corners of his eyes faded. After breathing deeply several times, a smile came to his face.

"Please take your seats," he told Nurse Bemeyer.

Nurse Bemeyer guided me down a crowded aisle, helping me into a slick leatherette chair. The fatman next to me smelled like garlic.

"May I have your attention?" asked the amplified voice of Dr. Christoffer.

Both my arms twitched, and the fingers of my left hand danced to a tune that my ears couldn't hear. My not-so-intelligent mouth decided it was time to start drooling, and my nose decided to join in by dripping something thick and sticky over my upper lip.

Nurse Bemeyer wiped my face. When it came to the activities of my mouth and nose, she had what was referred to as job security.

My eyes cooperated and looked toward the front of the auditorium. I'd have to remember to thank them later. The auditorium was large, almost as large as the TV room of the Pennsylvania State Home for the Special Individual. Like the TV room, dozens of people sat facing forward, their eyes glazed, and their jaws slack. There was no TV to hold their attention, and I knew it was certainly not the old-man saggy body attached to Dr. Christoffer that they found so interest-



ing. It had to be the electric chair and the washing machine that fascinated them. I also found it interesting. Of course I'd read about it, but I'd never actually seen a washing machine that was sentenced to the electric chair. It must have eaten just one too many socks.

"Colleagues," said Dr. Christoffer, trying to pry the audience's attention away from the washing machine and to himself, "I have discovered the true function of the brain."

The garlic-drenched fatman next to me burped.

"The brain is not the center of thought," continued Dr. Christoffer, "but an organ that filters reality."

This didn't make much sense to me. When I was a child, my parents had owned a swimming pool. It was filtered. One cold and crisp morning I reached into the basket which held the debris captured by the filter and pulled out a dead frog. I've never met anyone with a frog in his head, so I can't see how the brain can be much of a filter. I think that the throat filters reality. I've known lots of people who claimed they had frogs in their throats. This wart wasn't as sharp as it thought it was.

"This is reality," said Dr. Christoffer. He turned to a chalkboard behind him and drew a single powdery white line along its entire length. "And this is how much our brains let us perceive," he said. He drew two close set narrow lines which intersected the center of the reality line. "We all exist between these two lines." For emphasis he smashed his chalk between the lines and was rewarded with a shower of white dust and chalk bits. "However," he said cryptically, "there are a few of us whose filters have drifted slightly, those whose sense of reality has drifted from the norm."

Heads turned and eyes stared at me. The garlic fatman burped again.

Dr. Christoffer had the old man's body stand as tall as its curved back would allow. "I have discovered the means to realign the mental filter of those who have drifted from the norm."

Turning back to the board, he drew another set of parallel lines slightly to the left of the first set. Above them he wrote two names.

"Two such individuals are Allen Griswald and the late Jack Sweeney."

My ears twitched at hearing the names. I think one of them was mine. I'm not sure which, but I didn't think I was Jack Sweeney. Jack Sweeney was a famous man, and I knew I was not famous. Jack Sweeney had been on TV. His real name was Mr. Sausage. Ten years ago Mr. Sausage had been president of the Clairville Savings and Loan. A little man who Mr. Sausage said lived under his hairpiece told him to kill his family, so Mr. Sausage diced his wife and two sons into little pieces and stuffed them into sausage wrappers. For five days he sold them door to door, making quite a tidy sum until he was caught. It seemed he didn't have a peddler's permit. When caught for this crime, Mr. Sausage explained about the man who lived under his hairpiece, and then slipped into a catatonic state. He never moved or spoke again.

"It was five days ago," said Dr. Christoffer,

"that I reached into the mind of Jack Sweeney and realigned the filter that had shifted the portion of reality he could perceive." He waved his hand over the electric chair and washing machine. "After a single treatment, Jack Sweeney stood from this chair and spoke." A smile filled Dr. Christoffer's face.

"And dropped dead while clutching a sausage and asking for ketchup!" shouted someone from the audience.

Dr. Christoffer's eyes narrowed and his cheeks grew even redder than normal. The wart quivered with anger. "Mr. Sweeney's old heart was unable to handle the excitement of being returned to a normal state of mind!" he shouted.

"And the sausage?" asked the same voice.

"A cruel joke," snapped back Dr. Christoffer.

"One of my esteemed colleagues planted it in the poor man's hand during all the confusion." He surveyed the crowd with a hawk-like stare, looking for the culprit. "This time the patient Allen Griswald is in outstanding physical condition, and should have no physical difficulties in coping with being brought back to our

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No 27
SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY REVIEW



THRUST 27 features Michael Bishop on undersappreciated SF author Pamela Sargent; an interview with Greg Bear; Richard E. Geis appearing in his first THRUST column (with help from Alter); John Shirley with criticism of the current state of SF conventions; Gregory Benford on Fred Hoyle's contribution to the development of hard SF; Marvin Kaye on immortality; and the best book reviews anywhere; and more! Subscribe today!

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limited perception of reality." He motioned towards myself and Nurse Bemeyer. "Please help Allen down," he said.

Nurse Bemeyer prodded my body from the leatherette seat and guided it to the center aisle. I had nothing better to do so I went along for the ride. With a little luck I might even get a look at the convicted washing machine.

"Allen Griswald is an interesting case," said Dr. Christoffer. "A normal child until the age of 12, he was then struck by lightning, and soon thereafter ran away from home and joined Reverend Smithlight's Traveling Revival Show. It seemed he had obtained the gift of healing."

I saw Dr. Christoffer gently touch his stomach. The garlic fatman burped in disbelief. The audience of esteemed colleagues mumbled in unison.

"I understand your skepticism," said Dr. Christoffer in not-very-understanding tones. "But this is exactly the type of phenomenon that we should expect to see from someone whose mental filter is shifting. They now perceive a reality that we cannot see. In this altered reality other things may be possible, things we consider impossible."

The audience did not seem impressed. The garlic fatman burped twice.

"Unfortunately, his mental filter drifted even further, and he soon had difficulty communicating both with other people and even his own body."

That was ludicrous. I communicate just fine. It's just that nothing seems to listen; especially my mouth.

"Albacore tuna," shouted my mouth, just to prove the point.

"The procedure that I will employ to realign Allen's mental filter is actually quite simple," said the doctor. "By attaching Allen to the Reality Monitor I will remove every vestige of the misaligned mental filter he presently has. In this state, the true nature of reality will pour into his brain."

The wart quivered with what I could only construe as pure delight.

"The human mind, being incapable of viewing true reality, will throw back up its filter, but ..." He held up an extended bony finger to drive home the point. "This filter will now conform to our norm. The consciousness of the audience will force the filter to align to our narrow band of reality. Allen Griswald will be cured!"

An uproar filled the audience. Several people laughed. The garlic fatman let out a record-setting three burps. But I noticed hardly any of this. My body had sat in the electric chair, and my eyes were now looking at the washing machine. My eyes were being most cooperative today.

Dr. Christoffer walked to the washing machine and lifted up the lid. I didn't see a load of laundry anywhere. It was then that I realized he must be taking out a load. Reaching in and rummaging around, he pulled out a football helmet to which was attached the longest strands of noodles I had ever seen. No matter how far he pulled out the helmet I couldn't see the end of a single piece. I hoped Mrs. Christoffer wasn't in the audience to see the sort of things her husband tried

to put in the washing machine.

He slipped the football helmet over my head.

"All I need do is activate the master switch, and in a few moments Allen will be cured."

The audience sat quietly at this proclamation. I might have heard half a burp, or it might have been my ears popping and playing tricks on me. Dr. Christoffer set the washing machine to rinse and pushed in the knob. Nobody starts washing clothes on the rinse cycle I thought. It was the last thing I thought. My head exploded.

*** **

I looked through a fishbowl.

The barn swallow cocked its head. "It's really quite simple, Allen, reality is a single continuous relationship. It's little more than a single equation with user-defined boundary conditions and an infinite number of solutions." Its brown beak pecked for hidden mites beneath its wing feathers.

"I don't understand," I chirped in barn swallow. It was the least I could do since the bird was kind enough to talk to me in English.

A gassy maelstrom belched gravity waves. "Of course you don't," said the quasar. "The filter still remains. Let me help you," it said.

I drifted through a radiation sea. The quasar gobbled two red giants, a neutron star and topped off its meal with a pulsar. Like the garlic fat man, it burped, but what it burped was hard gamma rays.

The fishbowl over my face crazed.

"It's so simple," said the old samurai. "Reality is what you make it. If the mind wills it, the fabric of reality will conform to it."

I bowed to the warrior and was rewarded with a smashing blow of his sword. I heard glass break.

"It is will alone that dictates reality," roared Thor. His biceps bulging, he swung his hammer in a double-handed grasp over his head. "Will it," he bellowed. The hammer crashed into my fishbowl helmet. A chink of glass flew before my face. A hard light of infinite colors poured into my eyes.

"Do you understand now?" asked the Tin Man. "Have you got the heart to use your mind?"

I nodded, my head rattling in the cracked and broken fishbowl.

"Then take heart!" he yelled, his jaw locking open as he screamed. A swing of his axe ripped the top of the fishbowl cleanly off my head. My brain sizzled.

"You're almost there now," said the cyclops. A single red eye stared into my face. "Can you see the equation? Feel the fabric of reality." It smashed my face with a tree-stump club. Glass shattered.

I picked myself up from the stone floor. Only the lip of the fishbowl hung around my neck.

"May I help you, sire?" asked the silver princess.

Floating above the floor, her white slippers too pure to touch the earth, she hovered before me. "The last slivers of the filter remain," she said. "If I remove it, your mind will define reality. Nothing will bind you." Her delicate fingers caressed the glass ring around my throat.

"Dr. Christoffer said that a filter directed by the consciousness of the audience would fill my mind," I told her.

"Only if you will it," said the princess. "You are now reality. Define yourself." She kissed my cheek gently, then lifted the glass collar over my head.

Nothing obstructed my vision.

"Can you hear me, Allen?" asked Dr. Christoffer.

I opened my eyes. Reaching up with hands that answered my brain, I removed the helmet. I stood.

The audience remained speechless. Not even a burp could be heard.

"Albacore tuna," I whispered.

"What did you say?" asked the doctor.

I looked into his face. He knew what I had said.

"Albacore tuna!" I shouted.

The auditorium shook. Dust rained down from the ceiling. A breeze pushed the hair off my forehead. I

could smell the sea, and hear the crack of waves. The sounds of pounding surf poured from the room's loudspeakers.

"Albacore tuna!" I roared. Fish exploded from the air. Flopping and squirming, gills pumping out remaining sea-water, tunas slithered across the floor.

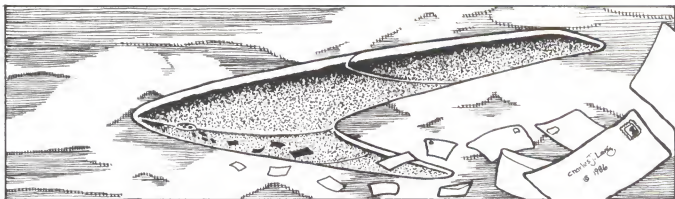
"Care for some mayo with your tuna?" I asked Doctor Christoffer.

Color drained from the old man's face. He sagged gently to the floor, which was now covered in wavy-white mayonnaise.

Far up in the auditorium the garlic fatman burped convulsively.

I never would have believed it, but the wart had cured me of my insanity. This was going to be fun.

— ABO —



Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers

Dear Mr. Ryan,

What with *ABO* four on hand and my subscription renewed, I thought I'd send some comments.

By far the best story in the issue was "Search and Destroy" (by Frederik Pohl). The way futuristic detail, compressed storytelling and surprise were worked into gritty, naturally flowing narrative showed mastery. Pohl grabbed you with the first sentence and didn't let go. A chilling vision, since our government is stupid enough to push prohibition too far.

"Tiger's Heart" was another suspenseful, gut-level story and perhaps suffers unduly in comparison: the situation less convincing, the writing less assured, the surprises a little less surprising.

The cyberpunk influence keeps diffusing into the

unlikeliest places, such as the Andre Nortonish "Shade and the Elephant Man" (by Emily Devenport). In this case, the incongruity made sense because Shade was divided in the same way. It was the second best story.

"IMAGO" had an exotic setting and sharply defined characters under pressure. (Mary) Kirtledge told us about the cutting sand and the duplication of split psychobionds; it wasn't her fault that I didn't put them together until she had escorted me into an elevator shaft. The weak side was that the "IMAGO" technology felt shaky. For example, can IMAGO really transmute matter?

If so, why does anyone need to mine anything? IMAGO formed a .38 revolver. Wouldn't IMAGO be used to form starships? (It would take a lot more power — Ed.) Getting technical and being

plausible are different things.

"Cowboys and Engines" was a sharp-edged, compact dose of action with enough imagination to be intriguing. Junior was the second unexpectedly female protagonist this issue and both times I was nicely suckered. I like the mysterious, ominous conclusion, but I had trouble with the chronology of novae. When did the first nova go off? I think the explanation was unclear.

I liked the concept of "Passing," the way the whole story developed, and there were good things, such as the repetition of the phrase "sometimes Susan thinks about the transmitter in her head ..." but the story depended on the perceptiveness of its alien views of human society, and these were commonplace. (Actually, the story was working on a different target, but that's the nice thing about good fiction

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— it's open to multiple interpretations. — Ed.)

The new format is fine. Putting the mailing sticker over the logo instead of the cover art is appreciated. Among the illustrations, (Val Lakey) Lindahn's for "Search and Destroy" and (Leslie) Pardew's for "Passing" stood out. I also enjoyed (Cortney) Skinner's ABO schematic.

I hope ABO continues to have lots of informal features. These give a magazine personality. Magazines without them seem empty somehow.

"Books" showed Darrell Schweitzer's good and bad sides. When reviewing fantasy or history and biography he is nothing less than authoritative, and once in a while he makes me want to cheer.

When reviewing innovative, ambitious SF he is a fugghead. (Whazzat? — Ed.) His review of *Trillion Year Spree* was a model review. As for his sneering review of *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*...

I haven't read it — I'm waiting for the paperback, if any — but I read *Eclipse* and (John) Shirley's future rock subcultures aren't the same as the Planet of the Jitterbugs. Rock has already lasted more than 30 years, continually adapting to changes in its cultural environment; it's not necessarily out of place in 2020. I just read "Snake Eyes" in the (Gardner) Dozois's best of (the year anthology), and I thought it was strongly imagined and compulsively readable. Its disturbing view of human nature may have a partial precedent in (Joe) Haldeman's *Mindbridge* but it's hardly "commonplace."

I also read "400 Boys" and it's as unreadable as Schweitzer says, so he isn't even a reliable negative guide. By the way, I wouldn't mind seeing this kind of material in ABO.

Best wishes,
Barnaby Rapoport
Storrs, CT

(Darrell Schweitzer is a good reviewer but readers should keep in mind that there is no such thing as a 100 percent objective human

being. Each of us carries our accumulated mental baggage, including tastes and predispositions (biases) to each new encounter, be it with a book or person. Thus your tastes and Darrell's (or even mine) may not always coincide. In other words, always sprinkle one or two salt grains on whatever your read or hear no matter who authored it. — Ed.)

Dear Charles,

I prefer your new format over the old (both easier to read and more likely to survive on bookshelves).

And just for the record, I think "Merchant Dying" by Paul Gilster is the finest story you've published this year.

Best,
Bruce Boston

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I love *Aboriginal SF*. I also love the new format. Ah! I can hear the boos and hisses from the majority reading this. I loved the mag before. Now I love it even more. I must admit the large format was bulky and the "continued to's" were a downfall. It is now perfect. The size is just right to be able to carry around and it is sure easier to store away. The artwork is smaller, but just as enjoyable. The stories seem to keep getting better and better. I loved "Passing" (by Elaine Radford).

Now I have come to my next point. I am requesting your writer's guidelines. I am enclosing a SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope) with this little note.

I expect to send you a few gold nuggets this summer instead of a little letter.

Sincerely,
Kurt Stecher

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I subscribed to *Aboriginal SF* at Readercon, and am I glad I did! My husband and I read the stories aloud to each other. Some

of it goes over my six-year-old's head, but he enjoyed the story about the Boogs ("Cowboys and Engines" by W.T. Quick), and he REALLY enjoyed "Almost 11" by Greg Cox. He keeps muttering "space ships should never try break-dancing" and chuckling to himself.

We especially like the notes by the Alien Publisher, and Darrell Schweitzer's no-pulled-punches book reviews. And the poetry! And the art! I'll be sending in a renewal check as soon as I can get ahold of S—— G——, whom I gave a blank check to, and find out how much she filled it out for.

In one of the issues, you gave story length parameters as "between 2,000 and 8,000 words," but I notice that in the May/June '87 issue you say "between 2,500 and 4,500 words." Have you changed policy, or are you just stating the preferred length and figuring writers will bend the boundaries anyway? (Yes, 2,500 to 4,500

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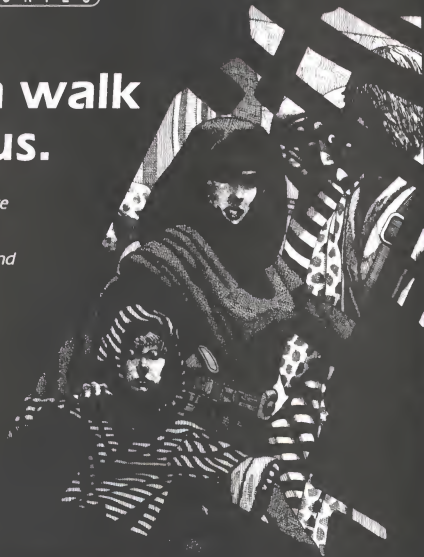
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ABO

Skin Deep

By Emily Devenport

Art By Wendy Snow-Lang

I don't know when I began to suspect that Lacy Anderson was losing her mind. Maybe it was when she borrowed my hologram camera to take pictures of her dog, Puke. Maybe it was when she spent next to her last dime on the only licensed veterinarian on Moasai. She certainly had more important things to do with her time — like taking care of her herd of kazaaki steers — than to waste it on Puke or, unfortunately, me. All I know is that by the time she and I sat in my deli one Saturday afternoon, filling out the forms for the Ugliest Pet In The Galaxy Contest, the idea was firmly fixed in my mind.

"Here is Dr. Neill's sworn statement that Puke really is this ugly and not just sick," she was saying as I scribbled. "And the holos came out well, Michael. I was afraid I would ruin them."

I had been afraid of the same thing, but those holos were perfect. And I had only had to demonstrate the camera to her once. I glanced at the holos and over at their subject, Puke. The light of Moasai Prime slanted in through the sandlock and bathed him in gold.

I wondered if he was named Puke because of his color or because that is what looking at him makes you want to do. He glared back at me, his tongue lolling through his underbite. "Good likeness," I said. I would rather have been looking at pictures of Lacy, golden skinned, gray-eyed Lacy. Just being in the same room with her made my heart beat faster.

She glued one of the holos onto the form. "Under this one you will say this," she directed. "Not only is Puke ugly on the outside, he is ugly on the inside too. Here is Puke mugging a small child for her ice cream cone." And tell them his passion for ice cream may account for his acne."

I wrote it exactly as she put it. Lacy had a way with words, despite the fact that she could not read or write.

"Next comes the holo of Puke rubbing his face in a dead pilake rat," she continued. "You might mention that his favorite Pet Chow is Carrion Flavor. Do you think that will please them?"

She was referring to the Gibraltar Pet Food Company, the sponsors of the ugly pet contest. "I'm sure they'll be pleased to know they have a fan in Puke," I told her.

"First prize is ten thousand credits," Lacy said, smiling in that wide open way she had. "Even third prize is enough to get me off Moasai."

I didn't want to hear about that. I love Moasai. It is a world my Apache ancestors would have felt at home in. I couldn't understand why Lacy wanted to go. Her great-grandparents came over on the first colony ship, just like mine. Didn't she know when she was home?

"What about that last holo?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "The best for last. Here is Puke biting the hand of an old woman who was trying to pet him."

That was Puke all right. He sat looking at us from his chair, his mass spilling over the sides. It was hard to find anything but pure meanness in that face of his, but for a moment I almost thought he looked sympathetic, as if he knew how I felt.

He farted. I wasn't sure how to interpret that.

"Too bad this form can't record smells," I said. "Because Puke would win for sure."

"I know," Lacy said wearily. "Ten thousand credits, Michael. I'm sick of scratching out a living as a ranger. Chasing Kazaaki steers up and down the sand dunes — dust in my boots and lucky to get a bath on Saturday — and *him*." She stabbed her finger at Puke, who wagged his tail. "Farting in my cabin and getting me in trouble with the townsfolk."

She meant it. It suddenly occurred to me that Lacy believed she and Puke would win the contest. I almost told her what I really thought, but I could not get the words out. I knew she considered me a friend, and she was beginning to mean a lot more than that to me, but there was still a lot I didn't know about her. Like whether or not a wrong word from me might send her back out to the desert as suddenly as she had wandered in. So I kept my mouth shut and helped her finish the forms. I even closed my deli for the afternoon so I could walk with her to the post office.

Lacy mailed the contest forms in the afternoon, just in time to catch the monthly ship. "I've done my best," she kept telling me. "The rest is up to them." She glanced at Puke and seemed satisfied that he was still ugly.

We plodded through streets that were choked with gold dust even though it was well past storm season. It coated our clothing and hair, camouflaging us from the view of others — and they from us. I was watching carefully, but I didn't see the Zouani warrior until he was practically on top of us. He strode down the middle of the street, and his skin was the same color as the dust that powdered it. Gold clay had been worked into



the many braids that hung down below his knees — a considerable distance, as he was at least eight feet tall. Eyes like black stones sat in his expressionless face, without the benefit of white or irises to tell us where his gaze was directed.

But he was heading straight for Lacy.

I put my hand on her arm, and the two of us waited for him together. He stopped and inclined his head to Lacy. She nodded back, and it was plain from her expression that she knew him. Unless you live on Moasai you don't know how extraordinary that is. I had only seen a Zouani once before in my life, and we were not on speaking terms.

The warrior switched his gaze to Puke, who sat scratching himself a short distance away. Lacy hissed with anger.

The Zouani gave his attention back to her. He smiled, barely showing the tips of his teeth, and spoke to her in a low voice. Lacy answered him. He strode past us, never once sparing me a glance, and disappeared around the corner.

Lacy grabbed my elbow and propelled me down the street until we had rounded a few corners ourselves.

"What was that all about?" I said.

"Festival camp is only thirty miles from here this year," she said.

I hadn't known the Zouanis held festivals. I'd thought they were too mean to celebrate anything. "You don't like that?"

"Like it?" she hissed. "I was hoping I would have another year — can you get away from the deli for a few days, Michael?"

"Why?"

"I am allowed to bring one close friend." She kept her eyes on mine as she said this, and a slow red burned its way across her face. I would have fought every Zouani on Moasai just to have her look at me like that again.

I coughed. "Why, Lacy?"

"That warrior and I have a dispute over the same property." She nodded to Puke.

"Puke? You mean somebody else actually — uh, he wants Puke?"

"Yes, but he won't get him. I'll fight for him."

Puke peeked around the corner at us and wagged his tail. Somewhere deep in his gut something noxious was gurgling.

"Will you come, Michael?"

"I wouldn't miss it for anything."

She seized my hand in a surprisingly gentle grip and blushed again. She let it go almost as quickly, but the warmth lingered. "We should leave before dawn," she said. "We don't want to be caught out in the open in the full heat of a day."

The temperature must have been upwards of 130 degrees F before we found any sign of the Zouani camp. Or rather Lacy did. I was too dazzled by sun and sand to be of much use by that time. To say Moasai is a desert world is an absurd understatement. Sand and mountain and sun seem to blend into an endless golden horizon. It was a trip I will not soon forget, one that sometimes haunts my dreams with an

awesome, relentless presence.

I probably would not have seen the small canyon until I had fallen into it.

"Where are the sentries?" I asked as we descended a path that was almost too small for the surly beasts we were riding.

"They're here," she said. "Don't doubt it. By now half the camp knows about us."

I had a belated attack of nervousness. Every story I had ever heard about the savage Zouanis — mostly from people who had never seen one — came pouring into my mind. My beast picked up my nervousness and hissed at me.

But the Zouanis greeted us at the edge of some trees in what at least appeared to be a friendly manner. I caught my first glimpse of Zouani women and children — never even seen them in holos — as they swarmed up to our mounts to investigate. I was amazed at the amount of racket they made until I realized that this was a good way to notify the warriors that we were entering the festival camp.

"Smile, Michael!" Lacy called.

"Does it mean the same thing to them as it does to us?"

"Sort of. Mostly it means that you have a good strong set of teeth!"

That was one thing I certainly had.

The men kept their distance from us. I could not read their expressions well enough to know what they thought of us, and I was careful not to smile too much at their women. This was no easy task, because they were fascinating, almost as tall as the men, willowy and golden-skinned. Their heads were shaved except for one slender braid which was decorated with colored beads. They touched our clothes and stared at us with eyes like large black jewels.

Any one of a dozen warriors I saw could have been the man who was in town the day before. "Which one is your rival?" I called to Lucy.

"He's not one of these," she called back. "Don't worry, you'll see him soon enough. His name is Tuaju. We'll be staying with his family. He has a reputation for good hospitality." Her voice was a little rueful for that last part, but she was glowing. Her skin looked almost as golden as theirs. Perhaps that was why they found her so easy to accept. She seemed more at home here than she had in Port Town.

Something barked at me from the feet of the crowd around my beast, and I looked down to see Puke running along with them. I heard another bark, this time from the back of Lacy's mount, and there he was again, sitting in his usual spot. The dog on the ground was joined by another, and I spotted more lolling at the feet of some of the warriors, all variations on a theme of Puke.

Just when I thought Puke was the ugliest dog alive! Compared to some of these others he was downright good-looking.

Our beasts came to an abrupt halt near a tent that was more ornate than most, but less than some. A young woman stood out front. The crowd parted for her as she approached us. She came to me first, but didn't say a word. I gave her a good look at my teeth.

"Michael," Lacy said, "that's Nisa. She is Tuaju's

youngest wife and our hostess."

I bowed to Nisa as gracefully as I could from a sitting position. I must have done pretty well, because she flushed a deeper golden color.

"And where is Tuaju?" I asked.

"We won't see him until the games begin," said Lacy. "Then he and I will compete together with the warriors. Help me with this pack, will you?"

I went to help her undo the knot. A hundred twin pools of black reflected my every move.

We spent the night in Tuaju's tent, which managed to keep most of the dust out despite the absence of a sandlock, and slept well into the morning. Tuaju's wives were gracious to me, and they chattered with Lacy as if she were a visiting relative. Thelathini, the eldest wife, brought us a bowl of shelled pilake nuts and a skin of sweet wine. She sat and shared these with us.

"I would think Tuaju's wives would be a lot less friendly considering you have a dispute with their husband over the same property," I said. To my consternation Lacy translated this to Thelathini. Thelathini leaned back against the cushions and considered me a moment before she answered.

"She says an occasional defeat is good for a man," said Lacy.

I wondered if Thelathini meant this or if she simply did not want Puke to come live with her. He was being pampered as much as we, and several neighbors had already stopped by to exclaim over him, but I couldn't see that he was any great bargain. Fortunately they had strong incense to cover his emissions.

We stayed in the tent through the long morning and well past the worst heat of the day, but Lacy did not move once. "Aren't you going to stretch out or warm up for the competition?" I asked her.

"If I need special preparation to compete I am not fit to compete," she said. At that moment drums began to sound throughout the camp, and Lacy got smoothly to her feet. I tried to do the same, my muscles screaming with protest.

"You are the first outsider ever invited to see the games," she said. She looked excited and proud. I felt like a nervous wreck. I wondered if I should wish her good luck or if she would consider that an insult. Before I could make up my mind she turned and slipped through the door flaps.

Tuaju's wives and I left the tent and joined a moving crowd. I was lost in a forest of Zouanis. We flowed up the paths to a broad plateau. Today no one paid any more attention to me than they did to each other. This made me feel at home. Why would Lacy want to leave Moasai when she belonged to a family like this one? Already I felt a kinship with the Zouanis.

But then the games began, and I realized what an alien I truly was.

Men filed onto the field for the first contest and paired off. They carried staffs, knives, curved blades like small scythes, and clubs. As they waited for a sign from the judges to begin, their scent floated to us from across the field. The spectators strained forward and bared their teeth like beggars at a banquet. I felt my

heart pounding in my chest like a hammer.

When the contest began I thanked a god I haven't spoken to in years that Lacy was not on the field. Men maimed and killed each other, following no apparent set of rules. And there was no weeping from the women when a man was killed. They might have been watching a soccer game instead. The contestants fought until only two men were standing. I thought they would fight to the finish, but instead they saluted each other and walked off the field.

As the area was cleared for the next game I took a good look around me, this time without my rose-

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colored glasses. I saw old warriors with terrible scars, proudly worn.

The next game was a riding contest, involving the same beasts Lacy and I had used to cross the desert to the festival camp. The Zouanis call them ghaafe, and to me they look like a cross between a giant lizard and a sabertooth tiger. Sitting on one is like trying to ride a mountain in an earthquake.

I saw Lacy ride one up to the starting line. She and the other contestants stood up on the backs of their animals. They held the reins with one hand and spears with the other. The ghaafe were made to eat some sort of weed that made them restless. Only the most skilled riders were able to keep their ghaafe from jumping the gun.

A sharp cry from one of the judges started the ghaafe racing off about three times faster than I had believed they could possibly go. As the riders passed the targets they threw their spears, then reached down to grab a second spear from holsters at their feet. As they looped around from a second pass several riders lost their footing and were trampled by the riders behind them.

"Lacy!" I didn't know I had jumped to my feet, until Thelathini pulled me down and pushed a wine skin at me. I craned my neck until I caught sight of Lacy riding out front.

She kept her feet the entire game, but every time I saw someone go down I held my breath until the dust cleared. I have no idea how well she aimed her spears — I was too busy looking at her feet — but from the grin on her face I assumed she did pretty well.

She was good in everything she entered, especially the running and riding contests, skills which I'm sure she needed in her life as a kazaaki ranger. The competitors were allowed brief rests between each game, but no food or water. Lacy glowed, her stamina seeming to increase with each contest.

Thelathini kept passing me the wine skin, her eyes glittering.

Nisa, the youngest wife, and Pilikita, who was one step above her, left about midway through the games. Pretty soon exotic and savory smells began wafting on the breeze, and musicians tuned their instruments. No one paid these distractions the slightest attention until the last game was over.

I shaded my eyes and tried to find Lacy in the clouds of dust the last game had raised. Those who were not dead or too badly injured were joining their families for feasting and music. I finally saw her helping a man from the field. I ran and held up the other side until his family took him off our hands.

"Did you win?" I asked Lacy.

"Anyone who survives the games is a winner."

I was confused, but she seemed happy, so I assumed Puke was still hers. Maybe it had been enough for her to prove that she could compete with the best of them.

I got into the feasting half of the festival a lot more enthusiastically than I had the gaming half. Considering the carnage I had just witnessed my appetite was surprisingly good. But when I reached for a plate of tubers Lacy slapped my hand. "Those will kill you," she said. "And those red ones over there. The spiced

kazaaki is good, but it will keep you up all night. Try some redbeak with pilake sauce."

I sampled a little of the kazaaki anyway. It smelled too good to resist. Besides, I was feeling a little reckless with Lacy sitting next to me, intoxicating me, acting so proud and possessive. She didn't blush anymore when she held my hand.

But I was still aware enough of what was going on around me to notice the warrior who kept staring at Lacy. It is too bad the Zouanis look so human, because it is easy to project human feeling into them. I was pretty sure the warrior was Tuaju, and that his expression was one of jealousy. One out of two ain't bad.

Tuaju stood and shrieked. Everyone quit talking. I glanced at Lacy to see if she was ready for trouble, but she simply gave him her attention. When he began to speak she translated for me.

"Festival is for more than games and feasting," he said. "It is also a time to settle disputes. You know me, and you knew my father Nitojurabu; but some of you do not know the story of John Anderson and his wardog Puke.

"Two stormseasons ago the finest dog in Nitojurabu's kennel was Red Jorri. We learned Jorri would drop her first litter on the march to the mountain strongholds. She gave birth before we could reach the shelter, and the delay left us critically exposed to the first stormwinds. Jorri's litter perished in the teeth of the wind; or so we thought. One pup survived.

"Jorri's pup wandered not far from our own hold in the mountains, to a place where the Rangers shelter when they can not reach their own strongholds. John Anderson and his young daughter took refuge there, and they found the pup half dead from hunger and exposure. They nourished him and raised him as their own, ignorant of his true owner. For five years they wandered the desert with their kazaaki steers, and their wardog was a wondrous and fierce beast. At the end of five years our paths crossed for the first time.

"We know the Rangers as dwellers in the desert, but we do not always call them brothers. When Nitojurabu saw the pup of Red Jorri he recognized his property instantly. When he tried to reclaim the wardog John Anderson struck him to the ground, and Jorri's pup was barely restrained from attacking my father by four good wardogs. Nitojurabu saw no other choice but to declare challenge.

"Since John Anderson was ignorant of our ways he was not fit to meet challenge, so it was decided that he and his daughter and Jorri's pup should be taken into bondage. Only when he learned to conduct himself as a warrior could John fight for his freedom and claim his wardog.

"For six years they lived with us. And when Nitojurabu could call John Anderson his equal he named his challenge. John defeated him. But now my father is dead, and it is for me to challenge John Anderson again, for their agreement ended with my father's death."

Tuaju sat down, and Lacy stood. I didn't learn what she said until much later.

"Some of you know me as your sister. I was a child once among you, now I am a grown woman. I hear Tuaju's challenge, and I am the one who must



accept it, for my father is dead. He was killed by a sandcat two years ago. I would have died too if my wardog had not been there to protect me. I will fight for him tonight."

Puke was led out of Tuaju's tent to a place where everyone could see him. Lacy glanced at him just once. The love and pride in her eyes made me wonder if she had other reasons for believing Puke could win a galaxy-wide contest.

Lacy sat and waited for Tuaju to speak again.

"It is my right to name the contest," he said. "I choose the same contest that John Anderson and Nitourabu fought when we were children: the Steel Web."

There was a murmur of appreciation from the spectators that stood my hair on end. Thelathini went to Tuaju and presented him with a bundle that was bound in the middle by a cord. The crowd moved back from Lacy and Tuaju. I moved with them.

Tuaju unwrapped the bundle. Inside were six long knives. He lifted one by the handle and looked past the blade at Lacy. A flick of his wrist, and he held the knife by its blade. Another flick sent it flying at her. I drew a harsh breath just as Lacy caught the knife and sent it back to Tuaju without so much as slowing down its motion.

Soon there were two knives flashing between them, then three, until all six were suspended in a web of moving light. If I looked too long it seemed the two of them held the edges of the web in their clever hands. Their faces were as calm as if they were drinking tea together.

The web faltered, and Lacy caught five knives from the air. All eyes went to Tuaju as he held up the sixth. His hand was bleeding.

"I concede," he said. "My praise to Lacy and her wardog Puke!"

Everyone shrieked and patted the two of them on the back. Thelathini caught my eye and grinned. I knew her gesture wasn't as friendly as it seemed, but I couldn't help grinning back.

Much later Lacy and I were left in our private section of the tent with some tea to share. I was tired, but Lacy was wide awake and excited as a kid.

"When I win the contest we can leave Moasai," she said.

"Yeah," I said unhappily, thinking she meant Puke and herself.

"How long do you think it will take you to sell the deli?"

I gaped at her. "I don't want to leave Moasai!"

"I am not a sophisticated woman," she said stiffly. "I misunderstood your feelings for me, and I am sorry."

"You did not misunderstand. I love you Lacy, and I wish you would get this crazy contest business out of your head. You don't stand a chance of winning —"

"I do stand a chance," she said quietly. I should have listened to her tone.

"You don't," I said. "You don't know a thing about offworld. It's a pit and it would swallow you whole. That contest is just another marketing scheme. They don't give a damn about you and your wardog."

She didn't answer that. Before long I realized that

she wasn't going to talk anymore. By then it was too late to take anything back.

Two months later we still weren't talking. If I saw Lacy at all it was from a distance. I worked in my deli and went through the motions of forgetting about her — until one evening when Will Parker, the postman, wandered in and sat down at the counter.

"I'll have a veggie special and a beer, Michael," he said.

"Coming right up." I made his sandwich and drew his beer. He watched me like he had something more to say.

"You know that Lacy Anderson woman pretty well, don't you?" he asked as I set his order down in front of him.

"Very well."

"You'll be interested in this, then." He pulled a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to me. "She asked me to read it to her. I think you should read it."

It was a letter from the Ugliest Pet in the Galaxy people. It said:

Dear Ms. Anderson,

We received your contest entry form, and though it afforded us some amusement, it failed to qualify for our finals.

Enclosed are holos of the pets who will go on to compete for the title. We thank you for participating and for buying our product.

There were six holos attached to the letter, all of Cthulu-faced wiggles. I stared at them, the absurdly delicate bodies and their tentacled faces. Stapled to the back was an advertisement for the Cthulu-Fad Wiggly Society.

"Damn." I didn't feel the least bit of triumph.

"She didn't say much when I finished," Will said. "She just took herself and that dog of hers to Space-ly's."

I winced. Spacely's was the biggest dive in town. And the mood Lacy was in it wouldn't be a good place for her.

"Think you could do me a favor, Will?"

"I'll watch the joint for you. Go find Lacy."

Lacy wasn't in Spacely's. One of the thugs at the bar overheard me asking about her.

"You mean that broad with the ugly dog?" he said. "She wasn't much to look at herself." I stared at his fat, stupid face for a moment and he laughed. "Hey! This guy's got a hard-on for that hawk-faced bitch —!"

He didn't get any farther, because I broke his jaw. Broke a few knuckles too, but it was worth it. I left him on the floor and headed for Lacy's cabin. I hoped I could catch up to her before she reached the edge of town. The desert is easy to get lost in at night.

I thought about our argument as I walked, about how hollow everything had seemed since that day. I had been listening for the sound of Lacy's voice outside my door. All this time I had been thinking I could never leave Moasai. But Lacy was Moasai.

I walked and I thought, but I didn't watch where I

was going. I heard a low growl just ahead of me. It sounded like Puke. I had passed the city limits without realizing it.

"Lacy!" I called, but the word was lost in a deafening screech. Something slammed into the middle of my back and hurled me to the ground. I looked up into a nightmare of teeth and fur, and claws that tore my jacket to shreds. The jaws came for my throat, and I twisted so they sank into my shoulder instead. My bones crunched under the pressure.

I heard another growl, and the weight was torn from my body. I tried to lift my head, but it was so much easier to lie there and look at the stars. "Are those what you wanted Lacy?" I whispered. "All I wanted was you."

I didn't die after all. I hurt too much to be dead. I pried one eye open and focused on Lacy asleep in a chair. Something stirred at the foot of my bed, and I found Puke. He yawned at me nonchalantly, revealing a cavern full of fangs and bad breath.

"Lacy?"

She was instantly awake. She poured a glass of water for me from a pitcher on the bedside table. It was my table and my room.

"The Doc just left," she said. "I could have done as well for you, but Will Parker insisted."

"What hit me?"

"Sand cat. Puke got him." She gazed at me for a long moment with moist eyes. "Michael, I'm sorry I stayed away for so long. You were right about the contest. I'm a fool."

"I wouldn't waste my time on a fool," I said. "I've missed you, Lacy."

I patted the bed beside me and she climbed in. We snuggled as close as my injured shoulder would allow.

"I'm selling the deli," I said. "I can show you the outer planets on that, but we'll have to work our way through the rest."

"You don't have to do this for me."

"I want to. I was secure and comfortable in my little niche, but I wasn't happy. Too much of my great-grandfather in me, I guess."

We stared at the stars through my window. I could feel Lacy's agreement in the way she rested her head against me. Puke snored loudly at the bottom of the bed.

"We'll be happy," Lacy said. "The three of us."

Two months ago I would have winced at the thought of sharing the same living quarters with Puke. But he had already accepted me as part of the family. How could I do less?

"We'll be happy as long as we have a good room deodorant," I said.

She laughed. "But someday we'll come back."

"I don't think we could stay away if we tried." There was no way we would ever get the sand of this world out of our blood. Next time we went to Festival we would have stories to tell.

We held each other into the night, until our snores mingled with the wardog's.

— ABO —

Flashing The Black Long Streets

By Wendy Rathbone

Outer space slips though its boundaries and expands.

The magician thinks it is an aborted disappearing act, the comic, a joke that conveniently burst. Everyone has a theory.

The phenomenon echoes the Big Bang, scientists say, like entropy and the natural growth of all things.

It is God giving birth, the second coming.

So the evangelists ask for more money.

The survivalists know this is the end of the world.

They ready ammunition, hoard water, canned peaches and little green peas.

Children cry that the nightmare has finally come to life.

The multi-legged creature drips a slimy path into their jumping hearts.

But the bag lady in her crazy honesty lives the simple truth.

It's just another day flashing the black, long streets struggling to survive one more hour, a minute to postpone a too soon slippage through boundaries thin as skin.

— ABO —

Frenchmen

(Continued from page 24)

flaws, any cracks. There were none. It was perfect.

"It is beautiful, Sally Tobias." The voice had no accent she could place, but it sang like the flutes on her tree. She put the piece down carefully and looked around.

"So there is a cavalry," she said softly.

The alien made a complex shrugging motion, setting rainbow fur shuddering up and down its length. It seemed solid enough, projection though it must be; she looked in vain for any blurring or translucence. She thought it had two eyes and a small mouth in its silky face; she could definitely discern the six small arms it waved. "So your people say we have been called, the ones who sent the message," it sang in a soft, breathy voice. "We must confess we do not understand the concept. Or so many others — 'Scientists?' 'Rescue squad?'" It made the motion again. She stared, fascinated, at the colors shimmering through its fur. "We did understand the concept: 'Messengers.' If not the message."

She took a breath, a strange taste in her mouth. An alien was in her cabin. Or, despite appearances, some kind of projection — but it was the cavalry, and she, one bruised and desperate scout. "The message must be pretty clear."

"Perhaps," said the alien. "Perhaps not. These scientists, they do not seem to speak in concepts we know. But they seem so urgent. This is why we asked to speak to messengers who are not scientists. We think you were a lucky choice." She was silent, wondering what it meant, remembering not to ask. "We hoped to find someone who works with the true concepts, the real concepts." It moved smoothly across the room to the new wind-flute. "May this be looked at?"

She nodded. It did not move. "Yes."

The alien picked up the piece and studied it. It held the flute forward and made a gesture with three arms that took in the room, its disorderly stacks of pots and tiles, and the window through which the song tree could be seen. "The concept is 'art.' You are an artist."

Her cheeks warmed. Most humans thought her a potter, a craftsman. She smiled at the alien who had seen artistry. "Thank you."

"Why? It is truth," said the alien. It looked closely at the flute. "There is no problem here. Art is made."

"But there is a problem," she said carefully, breaking the rule of only answering questions. "This planet is my home, and it is dying."

"And?" said the alien.

"And what?" she said. "It's dying! We're dying, and it's terrible!" Pain built in her chest. She had not truly allowed herself to feel this for a long time.

"They have tried to explain why this is terrible. We still do not understand. All beings die. Species die. Where is the failure? We have made a light-poem of

what they told us, however, to meditate on."

In one tiny hand, by the flute, was a hemisphere, a deep iridescent purple. The alien made a motion over the object and the hemisphere's flat face glowed. In quick, dreamlike succession, Sally watched: crops and forests shriveling as killing rain drenched them; rivers clogging green with algae until they rotted brown, empty; the bombing of South Africa and of Iraq; poisons, unnaturally black, spewing over cities, held there in choking inversions; one of the melted-down fission plants (which one?), buried in concrete, cordoned off in a wide, wide radius; the greedy, spreading Sahara; dying insects, dying birds, dying animals; dying children.

"Is this correct?" the alien asked.

An unfamiliar sound came from her throat. "That isn't what it looks like, all of it," she whispered. "But that's what it feels like. Oh, can't you see?"

"What should we see?"

"It's such an ugly, such a pointless way to die!"

"Ugly," said the alien. "Ugly."

She seized on its hesitation. "Ugly! We are killing ourselves, and it's hideous!"

The hemisphere had vanished; the alien ran several hands over the flute. "Ugly, and pointless. Yes, Sally Tobias, we begin to see." She closed her eyes. "The concepts do not quite match. 'Religion' is not exactly right. Even 'art' is not exactly right. But — you lose beauty with this death?"

"Yes." Oh, if she let herself hope now —

"That should not be. It will be fixed. May we?"

She did not understand, swept in dizzying relief, until she saw the alien transferring the curving green wind-flute from hand to hand, in a complicated gesture. "Of course."

"Thank you, Sally Tobias." The flute disappeared to wherever the hemisphere had gone. "We shall not meet again. Our people shall remove your problem, and leave. We have — a mission? — a solar system to reshape. It was most fortunate that your planet was on our route."

And they did not meet again, although the aliens left their mark on every acre of the planet.

Sally spent days debriefing, watching videotape, trying to explain each word and gesture she had made. One hundred and eighty-six other people had also been flown to California from around the world for similar debriefings, but it seemed the scientists spent the most time on her.

After she had been there a week, one hundred eighty-seven hemispheres were distributed, gifts from the departed aliens. She sat in her white, empty hotel room, desperately missing her workshop. On the desk was a book one of her fellows had located for her. In her hands was the hemisphere. She turned it and touched it until, when she held it just so, it lit up and revealed:

A green Sahara: a desert that glowed green by night and, when people walked through the aura, surrounded their figures with soft spikes of light like pink lightning;

Clear rivers, rivers that ran as clear and shining as crystal, and colder by far than water;



Factories puffing smoke, solid, pastel smoke that billowed and muffled the dirty buildings like cotton candy, hiding the grime;

Hundreds of acres of soil-stripped farmland, flat and empty but tinted with shimmering colors like a Cavalran's fur; observed from high altitude, the landscape was revealed to be a copy of Seurat's painting of La Grande Jatte ...

The Cavalrans had made their changes and left. She glanced at the book on the desk. She had read it once before, in high school. It was open to a comment that a fourteenth-century Frenchman could no more understand the statement "Good sanitary plumbing is more important than art" than a modern man would understand the converse statement. Beauty is eternal, this life only temporary, *n'est-ce pas?* We must please God.

"What did they say to you?" she asked the man who found her the book.

He smiled ruefully. "That species are born and

become extinct. That only what is left behind has meaning."

She had always counted herself proud to be a medieval Frenchman — an artist — no mere plumber. There are so many plumbers.

The scientists let her go, finally, and she fled back to her cottage, her refuge. She stood in her back yard by the flute tree. It whistled its quiet tunes as the wind flitted through it, but they were difficult to hear.

The real sound came from the mountains of New Mexico, which towered with twists and hollows and holes and colors in careful homage to Sally's wind-flutes. They roared high beautiful music like laughter.

Sally laughed too. She took a stick and smashed the flutes on her tree, methodically smashed each one, and sobbed and laughed.

"Send us a plumber!"

— ABO —

Boomerangs

(Continued from page 38)

words is our preferred length, but we break our rules every once in a while.—Ed.) I don't tend to write them quite that short, though I keep trying. (If you can learn to write a good 2,500-word story, you can then write anything.—Ed.)

Please send my a copy of your writer's guidelines. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Best regards,
Carol R. Morrison
Acton, Mass.

Absolutely love it! Can hardly put it down!

Nancy Page

Dear Charlie,

The very first story I read in the July/August issue was "It Came from the Slushpile" by Bruce Bethke (Because what the heck, I couldn't resist!)

I had to compare rejection slips with Bruce. Some of his are um ... quite inspired. Tell me, do you know if he frames his, too? (Yeah, in concrete.—Ed.)

I've almost got enough to finish one wall in the den, but since I'm being published more often, they've become few and far



Lillian McManus

between (on the wall as well as in the mail!).

My favorite has always been:
Dear Ms. McManus:
"??!"

and signed by someone who has to remain anonymous.

Thanks for your reply on the copyrights. I'm a bit disappointed at not being able to use excerpts in my column (*Actually, you can copy the sub form on page 61 as many times as you like—Ed.*), but I have managed to get our book reviewer to look over a copy of your fine magazine.

Congratulations on being accepted by Waldenbooks.

Best wishes from your friend,
Lillian McManus

P.S. Since I see your face at the head of your column in each issue, I figured it's only fair I send a photo of me. Not exactly the size to re-cover your dart board, but not bad for target

practice when you're in a bad mood. (O.K.—Ed.)

Fellow Abos,

Ah, if only I was 30 years younger, I would fight to join your staff just to meet Laurel Lucas.

Aside from beauty, your magazine is very good. I heard about it by accident, and subscribed on a whim. I was very surprised to get the first four copies as well as the current issue. Thank you.

Of the stories, there was only one I didn't really like. Not a bad average for you.

I am renewing my sub.

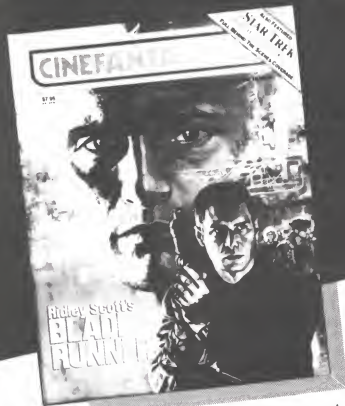
Sincerely,
Richard Sheldon
Barstow, Calif.

— ABO —

New Tax Law TIP

To help you understand the new tax law, the IRS has two new publications. **Publication 920** explains changes affecting individuals and **Publication 921** explains changes affecting businesses. Both are free. Ask for one at any IRS office or call the IRS Tax Forms number in your phone book.

TAX TIP
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CFO goes CYBER PUNK!

The next issue of **CINEFANTASTIQUE** zeroes in on the cyberpunk world of the summer smash **ROBOCOP**. This in-depth production article gives a behind-the-scenes account of the Houston shooting of this Paul Verhoeven film.

Additionally, this issue explores the cyberpunk literary philosophy, as propounded by some of the genre's leading visionaries, and discusses how their tales of "post-apocalyptic rubble" are headed for the silver screen. Author John Shirley describes his script **BLACK GLASS** as "the first real

cyberpunk movie," and author William Gibson tells us about his scripting of **ALIENS III** and traces cyberpunk film back to **BLADE RUNNER** which he claims "... looked so much like the inside of [his] head that [he] fled the theatre after about 30 minutes ..."

And, **MAX HEADROOM**, which also depicts cyberpunk fundamentals in its "tech-noir" setting, is analyzed episode by episode in light of these fundamentals.

CINEFANTASTIQUE is the leading review of science fiction, fantasy, and horror films, and has been covering the field for over 16 years. Our 64 colorful pages are filled with production articles; coming attractions; reviews; interviews with producers, directors, writers, and craftsmen; as well as retrospects on timeless genre classics like **20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA**.

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Challenger

(Continued from page 23)

end, a schoolteacher.

The shuttle was not up to this kind of showboating. But they went ahead and did it anyway; and that is a very implausible reality that we all have to live with.

Then there's the Soviet nuclear powerplant that blew up at Chernobyl, in April, 1986.

I've written a novel about Chernobyl; it was published by Bantam as a hard-cover in September. It is fiction, but not science fiction. If I had written it two years ago it would have been science fiction, but I don't think many people would have believed it.

The Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant was a graphite-moderated reactor of what the Russians call their RBMK series; since the Chernobyl reactor was rated at 1,000 megawatts, it was called an RBMK-1000. The Soviets have several dozen of these in operation; they supply a significant fraction of their total electric power capacity.

The RBMK has a few worrying characteristics. One of these is that it has what is called a "positive void coefficient," which means if the water which is heated in the reactor and then used as steam to turn the generating turbines gets so hot that it turns into steam in the reactor itself, it creates a kind of void in the pipes — steam being less dense than liquid water — and, as the water plays a part in blocking the neutrons and thus controlling the speed of the nuclear reaction, when that happens the reaction speeds up. If it speeds up too much, the whole core can go critical and then you have some kind of an explosion.

That's a big danger. However, it isn't exactly what happened at Chernobyl.

Soviet nuclear designers knew all about the positive void coefficient. They knew that under certain conditions the reactor could become quite unstable, and that the pressure of water passing through the core, and the deployment of the cadmium rods

that soaked up neutrons, would have to be kept in constant, rapid adjustment to match the vagaries of the reaction. So they designed for that. They put in six separate safety systems, most of them automatic. They were sensitive and fast-operating, and they provided a reasonable margin of safety to operate the reactor.

This technology worked just fine. The systems did not fail.

On the night of April 25th a year ago the top executives of the Chernobyl plant received permission to take one of their reactors off line for maintenance. They were eager to do that, because they wanted to perform an experiment that, if it worked, would provide quite a few extra megawatt-hours of electricity without using any more fuel. The extra energy would come from using the steam from the reactor after it was shut down, but was still hot, to turn the turbines. Essentially, it would be free electricity.

They didn't want to do the experiment just once. They wanted to repeat it several times, to take a series of readings and find out just how much power they could generate that way; so they didn't want to shut the reactor down entirely. They wanted to reduce it to a very low level, take their readings, start it up again and repeat the process.

That was difficult, because the RBMK gets erratic at low operating levels. They had trouble with the automatic safety systems, which kept wanting to crash the reactor.

So they turned the safety systems off. All of them. One by one, over a period of several hours.

And then, all of a sudden, at twenty-three minutes after one in the morning of April 26th, they heard a bang, and some of them went to look...and the core had exploded.

And, you know, that's a really implausible reality. You'd hardly believe it in a science-fiction story. I remember reading lots of stories about disastrous nuclear explosions — written long before there were any real nuclear power plants to explode, like

Robert A. Heinlein's *Blowups Happen* and Lester del Rey's *Nerves*. I don't remember ever reading a science-fiction story that suggested that such a thing could happen because a large and well-trained staff of technical experts, well aware of the potential disaster always waiting to happen, could have been so incredibly, insanely reckless as to dismantle the safety systems one after another while the reactor was in a known unstable condition.

Well...I have just spent seven months of my life researching and writing my book, and I'm tempted to go on and on about the subject of Chernobyl. I'll try not to; but just let me add a couple of things.

As soon as the news of the Chernobyl accident became known, American nuclear-power people jumped to the television studios to make known that such a thing could never happen here. EPRI, the Electric Power Research Institute, and any number of people from local utilities all joined in announcing that our reactors were better than their reactors; and none of our cores could ever go critical; and if one did the explosion would be contained; and, anyway, when you put ignorant Russian peasants in charge of such sophisticated technology, what did you expect?

I'm not really convinced of any of this. I think it very likely that our technology is better than theirs, but it wasn't the technology that failed. It was the people running the technology that failed; and they weren't peasants, they were highly trained, well educated specialists...who, in spite of all their education and intelligence, went ahead and did an unforgivably stupid, disastrous thing.

Can it really happen here? Can our own people do equally stupid things?

I wish I could say no. But just recently a nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania was summarily shut down because it was found that some of the night-shift operators were in the habit of going to

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sleep on the job; they might have been intelligent and able, but if anything had gone wrong they couldn't have done much, because they were asleep. The accident at Three Mile Island occurred because the operators there overrode the automatic systems mistakenly. Then there was Browns Ferry. There was a leak in the insulation in the nuclear power plant there. A workman was sent to fix it; he couldn't find it; in order to locate the leak he lit a candle and held it near the insulation to see how its flame would blow. It blew into the insulation, setting it on fire, and in the blaze that followed a majority of that power plant's safety

systems were knocked out because their instrumentation got burned up. The people of the Mid-Atlantic coast were lucky, because enough safety systems survived to keep the core from going critical — but the operative word there is "luck." It was just luck that kept Browns Ferry from total disaster, and I wonder how long our luck can hold out.

And, really, isn't that implausible, to think that people in charge of nuclear power plants can be so stupid, reckless and inept?

But that's reality for you. If these things happened in a science-fiction story, no one would believe them.

Unfortunately, we have to believe them — because they happened.

But we wouldn't put up with this kind of stupidity in science fiction. How odd it is that we are more tolerant of it in the real world.

— ABO —

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Yes, if you can write a good, but short, short story that we accept, we pay up to 10¢ per word. Of course if you write a longer story, your per-word rate drops accordingly. The reason is simple. We pay \$200 per story and will accept stories as short as 2,000 words and as long as 8,000, but we don't accept many long ones and prefer the really short ones. So if you think you're up to it and would like to earn up to 10¢ a word, then follow the rules below. *Aboriginal SF* will consider science fiction stories and poetry. No fantasy or horror. All submissions *must* be accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope with adequate postage, or they will not be returned. The preferred length for stories is between 2,500 and 4,500 words. We pay \$15 to \$25 for poems. Poetry should be one to two pages, typed double-spaced. All stories and poems must be original and previously unpublished. We also publish cartoons at \$15 each and jokes (50 words or less) for \$5. Cartoons and jokes must be about science, or be on a science-fiction topic. For more detailed writer's guidelines, send a self-addressed envelope with first-class postage.

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**Please
Give Blood**

Aborigines

(Continued from page 31)

of *Odd John* by Olaf Stapledon for Easton Press.

Her husband Charles, also an ABO artist, has just finished a cover for *Revenge of the Manitou* by Graham Masterton and is doing the cover for *Djinn* by the same author. Both books will be published by Tor Books, *Manitou* in October, *Djinn* next March.

Charles is also doing the cover for the re-issue of *The Big Time* by Fritz Leiber for Easton Press.

Robert A. Metzger brings us "An Unfiltered Man" the story of a man and his wart, or, if you like, a tale of modern psychiatry.



Robert A. Metzger

Metzger has a Ph.D. in semiconductor physics and is sometimes known as "Dr. Labdog." He says he is a "mad scientist" who works for Hughes Research Labs in Malibu, Calif.

He recently built the world's fastest silicon integrated circuit — the transistors turn on and off 30 billion times a second. (How do they keep count?)

Metzger made his first two short story sales to *Weird Tales* and *ABO* within two weeks of each other. His short story "Instrument of Allah" is set to appear in *Weird Tales* at the end of next year.

Metzger writes two short stories a month, and it's his only hobby. He has no others because he is "too damn hardworking for

my own good."

Metzger says he does manage to travel to the countryside to look at the Milky Way on occasion.

Multi-talented artist Larry Blamire illustrated "An Unfiltered Man."

Blamire, in his actor's mode, recently had a major role in the Boston production of *It's Only a Play*, by Terence McNally.

Blamire portrayed a director named Frank Finger in the behind-the-scenes comedy about the opening night gathering of a Broadway show's cast. The Broadway show so depicted turns out to be a flop, but McNally's play got good reviews.

Blamire is also having fun with a comic strip he created for *Stage Source* newsletter, a trade publication which keeps track of the New England talent pool.

Blamire's "Call Me Mr. Theater" revolves around one comic character who "represents all the obnoxious elements of the theater," he says.

Martha Soukup, another *Writers of the Future* award winner, brings us "Frenchmen and Plumbers" and the dilemma of choosing between practicality and aesthetics.

That's a question I confront whenever it's time to replace my automobile. Thankfully, not as weighty a problem as Soukup presents.

The author is a 1985 graduate of the Clarion SF writers' workshop at Michigan State University.



Martha Soukup

She says she has studied under 11 major SF writers, and sold her first story "Dress Rehearsal," last year to the late Terry Carr's *Universe 16*.

She has two stories, "Master of the Game" and "The Big Wish" forthcoming in *The Magazine of*



Pat Morrissey

Fantasy and Science Fiction.

When she won first prize in the *Writers of the Future* contest last year, she says she got a trophy which is "big, flashy, pretty, heavy, sharp and dangerous. I use it to kill home invaders."

Since moving to Albuquerque a year ago, Soukup, who claims she is a pacifist, has taken up Photon, the light-gun combat game. She said there are several other SF writers on her team, and they recently had a Shoot-a-Living-Science-Fiction-Writer autograph and play session.

"Frenchmen and Plumbers" is illustrated by Pat Morrissey, making her second appearance in *ABO* after illustrating "The Darkfishers" in our last issue.

Morrissey runs a graphic arts business and otherwise spends her days painting dinosaurs for planetarium shows, working on paintings for future science fiction conventions, and "defending the earth from marauding UFOs (see her photo)."

Her upcoming projects include working on another planetarium show about the history of science fiction. She's also designing an album cover for a musician

(Continued to page 63)

Doctor Doom Conducting

By Howard V. Hendrix

Art by Leslie Pardew

Cutting through the chainlink fence in the glow of the rented truck's headlights, I know my way is the way the world ends: with a bang, not a whimper. I am tired of whimpering, tired of turning the other cheek. God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Many times in the Old Testament He used His Chosen to destroy the nations of the Enemy. Tonight He uses me. I am the Chosen One. Tomorrow I will join Him in the New Jerusalem.

The last link in the fence snaps in the jaws of the boltcutters and the fence parts like the Red Sea before Moses. Walking toward the first thirty-meter dish, I remember how they laughed at me, said I was obsessed. The fools. Couldn't they see the signs? What were all the weapons being built for, at such tremendous expense, if not for use? Hadn't they understood Revelation? They were literary scholars, after all — academics, if not necessarily teachers. Wasn't it their job to bring their vast analytical powers to bear on such complex texts as the Book of Revelation? But no, trapped in their petty politics, their departmental debaucheries, they were blind to the truth, they deluded themselves, failed to appreciate God's plan.

But I know the plan, and my role in it.

No one else is here at the antenna array tonight. I suspected as much. The radio-astronomers seldom visit or even use this dated facility, so it stands, a silent metal forest above the pine trees, a Cyclopean army frozen in place on its high ground. I know it's here, and I'm here, and I know how to use it. That is all that matters.

I've always been very thorough in my research. When I wrote *The Ecstasy of Catastrophe*, my doctoral dissertation on the tradition of apocalyptic texts, I immersed myself, drowned myself in all the primary sources. From Daniel and Revelation, through *Piers Plowman* and *Paradise Lost*, to *A Canticle For Leibowitz* and *Gravity's Rainbow* — I read them all, all the visions of the End, all the secondary sources, too. For my trouble my colleagues — those secular humanist swine in the hallowed halls of academe whom I cast my pearls before — they smirked, shook their heads, said I had a "morbid fascination," called me "Doctor Doom" behind my back.

Activating the dish controls, I think of the name and smile. Yes. Doctor Doom. That's who I've become. In doing God's will I am the Doctor who will heal this tortured world of torturers — by dooming it

to die. I must kill the world to save it. Amen.

The radio dish swings slowly toward my first objective: Fleetsatcom 1, one hundred degrees west longitude, 22,300 miles above the Pacific coast of Ecuador in geosynchronous orbit. Oh yes, I've always been very thorough in my research. The reading material in my knapsack, besides the Holy Bible, includes this year's *Satellite Directory*, Long's *World Satellite Almanac*, NASA's most recent *Satellite Situation Report*, NORAD bulletins, Van Horn's *Communications Satellites*, and scraps of a dozen articles on the same general topic.

Consulting my books, I guide dish after dish toward designated points in the starry sky. I am thorough, careful, unhurried. I go back to my rented generator truck and begin setting up my equipment. I make trip after trip from the truck to the stands of the array, plugging cables to first one dish, then another. On the truck's broad bed, my transmitter sits hunkered down, an old monster: 5,000 watts and \$35,000 of equipment, but I need its power and it was an incredible bargain at the price. God's hand was definitely in the deal. Thank you, Jesus.

For the first shot at Fleetsatcom 1, I start the microwave signal generator and tune it to the right frequency — 293.975 megahertz — through the up-converter. The modulator, once activated, will shape the frequency into the holy screaming interference of God's Own White Noise Angel Hosts.

Checking my cable connections one last time, I think again of things I discovered in researching my dissertation. I learned that what lay at the heart of the apocalyptic impulse was a disjunction between the descriptive and the normative — between "what is" and "what ought to be." Throughout time people have recognized this split, have seen in it the alienation of Man from God, and they have tried to bridge the abyss. Some — the near-sighted ones — have become reformers or revolutionaries or prophets, all trying to retool the present system and thereby transform it into the system that ought to be. Others — fewer in number but wiser and more far-sighted — have seen that the gap between the descriptive and the normative is unbridgeable. They have become apocalypticists, recognizing that only by rooting out and destroying thoroughly "what is" can we make way for "what ought to be." They have realized that only by ending descriptive time can normative time begin.



In every generation there have arisen these holy wise men and women, preaching of — and devoutly praying for — the End of the World. But only since 1945, the year of my birth, has it become possible for One to fulfill the prophecy, to sweep away what is in order to reveal what ought to be. Only One can act in accordance with God's will and fulfill His plan. I am that One.

All is in readiness. I send the Angels out dancing and clogging to Fleetsatcom 1. The words of a young break-dancing student of mine drift up to me from out of the past and I think, *Now they be jammin!* I laugh and turn up the power, making the Angels dance harder. I change tempo again and again and they dance to different beats, different frequencies. Over a second dish swiveled toward a spot in the sky high over the Marshall Islands, I send the dancing Angels drumming off to Fleetsatcom 4. I alternate between the dishes, a polyrhythm, pulsing beatline of the music of the spheres, uptempo pounding silently into the sky.

They stopped my research last time. Time: always the problem. My dissertation committee said I was taking too much time. I ran out of normative time, so no more student support. But this time normative time goes on forever. Time is on my side. High time. About time. Time of high tensions in the world now. Our shadow Stealthy transatmospheric vehicle shot down over their territory, pilot taken prisoner in a land that is their satellite. The thorny question: Where does air-space end and outer-space begin? We send in commandos to break out the captured pilot. Fighting ensues. Shows of strength everywhere. In such a time, how do the listening soldiers interpret my dance of Angels, my drumming orchestration? An attack upon the satellite eyes and ears of national defense, perhaps? If they attack our satellites will we destroy their cities? Yes, yes: how perfectly logical and insane. Valuing things over people. Thank you, Jesus, for letting me be your instrument in destroying this sinful world.

I send signals from two more dishes swiveled toward points high in the sky over Siberia. Two of their ganglia, their nerve centers, their brain tumors, their death nodes in the sky — their counterparts to the Fleetsats. Send the Angels jamming, dancing, pulsing, trampling, galloping skyward. Two more beatlines. Four-part disharmony. Four-four time for our time. Horsemen of the Apocalypse. But what do they think it is, eh? Can they tell the dancer from the dance? The jammer from the jam? The marcher from the march? The soldier from the hired killer?

Or will they take their shot in the dark?

When the administrators cut my support I was on the verge of a great revelation! A sort of unified field theory of human conceptions of time. But I couldn't complete my research without that support — and I've always been a thorough researcher! I was forced to take a job as a Technical Editor at Armageddon Industries, a company doing God's work, it's true, but I knew my calling was to a higher, more direct involvement with the Kingdom To Come. I saved my salary. I read of the Captain Midnights invading the

satellite nets: a revelation from God. I saw my duty. I did my new research and integrated it with the old, in order to complete my studies. I bought equipment, made careful plans, waited for the right moment.

A dozen radio dishes swivel, pinpoint, spew celestial bands up and down the celestial bands. They pulse, they pound, they march, they dance toward a climax of unheard primordial music, toward a consummation devoutly to be wished. They send a whirl of motions to confuse and blind the warriors' eyes, scream a silent symphony-for-ballet, a Rite of Winter that only their electronic watchdogs can hear and howl to.

The great revelation, the great unification I was working toward, is this. All the visions of the future collapse into one: a Desert, whether it be the roundly scorched and frozen Mojave of apocalypse, the flat Sahara of vast eternity winding entropically flatward forever, or humanity back in the hypersaddle again, the Space Cowboy riding the range on the Final Frontier, an Outback whose sand-grains are stars. If we stayed in time, our end could only be desert.

So I have begun our liberation from time. I'm taking us to freedom, beyond time, saving us from time's trivial conflicts, saving us from ourselves, saving us for the Prince of Peace —

Ah, there! Bolts of lightning play over the dishes, my equipment sparks, explodes! EMP wave! There! There! Look! Look — and go blind! Explosions! Crescendos! The Arms Race Overture's Grand Finale! Beneath the stars of heaven, brighter Ear-thstars flare! Ah, the finest music is the music of what happens! There! There! Everywhere! Hallelujah!

It is finished. My research is complete. What is, is now what ought to be. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

— ABO —



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(Continued from page 15)

you complete fore-memory — or you'd have sussed this out. But they made me able to sense...the probability of where you were. And every time you acted to change history, well, it was just like snakes and ladders! I'd be rewound. Low probability of finding you again. Bloody frustrating. You really threw me off by going to London like that."

She paces faster, breathing deeper.

"But what's going on in '95? Celesteville must be in chaos. The whole Earth must be!"

"They're...a zone of foggy light out in space near L-4, and trailing Skytopia too. And there's one on the Moon, and lots of them down on Earth. Like cuckoo-spit. Sentient time-mazes is what they are, but to creatures locked in a single time line like us they just look like bright fog."

"But—"

"Let's celebrate my finding you!" She skips up to me, she plants a kiss. Her tongue slides into my mouth. A few moments later we both slide on to the back seat of the turbo; she thumbs the seat to recline into a bed.

Strange way to greet a fat boy, even if he's really svelte and forty-odd years old! It's a parody of my earlier conquest of Rachel. A replay.

Can't be bothered to resist her wily grip...At least a friend in adversity is something. Feeling sluggish, Liz, Liz, I don't know your second name. Are you rescuing me? Or destroying me? Is this what they told you to do, to snap us out of it? Asphyxiate me? Kill me? Heavy and light: too heavy to move, weightlessly afloat on this soft seat...

I'm floating weightlessly, breathing easily...

I'm in a place of light, in a cotton wool limbo, with silence in my ears. No, faint static. I'm afloat.

I'm in a suit, a *space-suit*. I'm in my future body! The limbo surrounds me, the luminous fog, but it feels as though I'm in space. Maybe I'm adrift along the null-axis on the center of Celesteville and climate control has broken down, producing a vast fog...But no, I wouldn't be in a space-suit there.

The fog seems brighter over in that direction.

I pulse the attitude jet. I drift. Towards the brightness. Suddenly the sun blazes forth. Blackness and bright, unwavering stars too. I'm on the edge of a globe of milky froth suspended in space. It's the milk of knowledge whipped into a foam, into a cloud of unknowing.

A few moments after I emerge, radio voices chatter in my ears.

"Dr. Farrer!"

"John!"

"You're back!"

"Do you read me, Farrer?"

"Are you okay?"

A shuttle hangs some way off, silver fish with

antennae fins. Further, shrunk by distance, is the familiar thirty-klick long cylinder of Celesteville!

A tiny scooter is jetting towards me, to rendezvous.

"I read you. Whoever you are."

For all I know, it's still 2090.

But it's 2095, just as Liz told me.

I learn that back in Celesteville, safely quarantined underground away from the fields and forests just in case I fill them with cotton wool.

I'm a hero, it seems. I'm the first person to emerge from the cloud with most faculties intact. Other volunteers have regressed to babyhood; some have gone mad. But Dr. John Farrer merely had the top of his memory creamed off. The bulk of the milk remains.

So here are my colleagues. Wolfgang Hesse; Francoise Gilot; Ernst Zandel; Richard Devenish. Good friends, from five-plus years ago. And Maria Menotti, my lover, of more recent vintage. So she tells me. I've forgotten her, but I will rediscover her. Perhaps we will take out a marriage contract when I get to know her again.

I'd been in the white cloud for seven days. They had given up hope. But my air-tanks only record a four-hour stay — and my memory knows that I was in there for weeks. Weeks of 2063.

The principal anxiety about the zones is not the fate of people who go into them. It is the fate of history itself — and therefore of the present — at the hands of whoever goes in. Earth, home of chaos, will not leave the zones alone. A sort of wildly dangerous time-war is going on, under the excuse of "investigating." Volunteers are being sent into the different zones on Earth: fanatics, hypnotized programmed agents "high" on Islam or Marxism or one or other Nationalism or Racism. And each time, shortly after such volunteers go in, patches of alternative reality spring into existence down on Earth. These patches measure ten or twenty square kilometres and endure for several hours or even several days until the baseline present reasserts itself again. We have a fairly good tap into the data-nets of the countries concerned. The results of their investigative interference have been: slave worlds, religious dictatorships worse than any Inquisition, radioactive wildernesses, a world where the white races all died of selective disease, one untrustworthy "utopia" where space has been abandoned...And each time that a spurious present temporarily asserts itself, a sort of shock wave, a quivering, passes through the whole of the real world like the reverberations of a gong beat — as though *everything* is about to change, and maybe it does change for a microsecond but then changes back again immediately. This is even felt out here at Celesteville.

"But you couldn't alter anything at all!"

Wolfgang Hesse says jubilantly. "You tried to, but you couldn't. Maybe this whole sorry mess is coming to an end."

"More important," points out Richard Devenish, "is the fact that John seems to have made contact with whatever operates these zones. I refer to the

creature who called herself 'Liz.'"

"Unless she was just some sort of anima-figure, a projection of his own subconscious which led him back home?" Maria Menotti sounds jealous of the possible existence of Liz.

"No," says Devenish. "This is the first substantive meeting indeed. Well, it's the first one that we know of. I really believe we've made contact."

"What with? With these entities that Liz talked about?"

"Don't you see? 'Liz' must be one of them, herself. This is our first real lead, Maria. The people down on Earth are just running through the time-mazes like lobotomised rats."

"Liz still could have been John's super-ego. He was rather naughty in there."

"A few misdemeanors, that's all. John has come back sane."

"I lost five years," I point out mildly, eyeing Maria. She knows my body; but I do not know hers.

"You ought to see the others. They lost their minds. John, you're our *interface* with this thing. With Them."

"Now, you aren't suggesting for God's sake that I go back again?"

Devenish spreads his hands.

"What other choice is there? Should we just sit around lamely till one of those rotten alternative world-lines firms up — and we all suddenly quiver out of existence? Or we find ourselves back on Earth, with Celesteville a vain dream? We have loyalties, man — to history as it was, to the history which led us to Celesteville. We have a loyalty to the human race as a going concern. We may be just like so many mice in a time-maze, to them. But we have a vested interest in stabilizing this particular pathway as the true and only present. And I honestly believe that this one is the only one that leads to the stars. Eventually."

"Well..."

"Good man!"

The space scooter stands off. I jet alone into the white fog. Radio contact cuts off once I enter the cloud.

I'm...walking through the fog, upon a solid surface. Gravity tugs me. Consulting the sensors strapped to my forearm. I discover that I can breathe the fog. It is comprised of nitrogen, oxygen, traces of noble gases. The pressure is Earth-normal. Am I now congruent with all the other zones on Earth?

I spy movement in the fog. A shape. Red hair, dimmed by the milky smoke. Same red slacks, blouse, boots.

I crack my helmet open.

"Hi! You came back — that's good. You're...constant. You've got consistency, Johnny." So has the fog beneath my feet.

"Out there." I jerk my thumb, "they want to know—"

"Do you want to know?" She laughs, witchlike.

"Do you crave the power that knowledge brings?"

"Our whole world might *change*."

"That would be a real shame, Johnny. But there's something more important than knowledge. Firm ex-

istence is more important. You, Johnny, exist. You are. Your world is. It *be-s*. But what is Being? Are we Beings? No, we cannot 'be' in the way that you can. You show us what it is 'to be.' Our intrusion threatens you with all possible world-lines, which is where we dwell: in the multiverse, not in your single universe. You tune all other existences out, bar one. We can make the world jump tracks. We can juxtapose. But we don't really wish to. Your singular reality is what we love."

"I love it too. Please leave us alone."

"Can the lover quit the loved one? Besides, your love conforms with ours. It was *you*, your own deep desire, which wound time back to its baseline. It wasn't us, Johnny." Liz examines her fingers as though they amuse her. She makes a cage of them. "This...constraint is very attractive to us. For where all possibilities are equal, none of them actually is. None truly exists. They are only waves of probability. But you exist. You have constructed a pocket of fierce deterministic causality. It's formed by the nature of your consciousness. It's embedded in the multiverse like a seed crystal. You have one true future — if we don't make the tracks jump."

"Do you *know* our one true future?"

She nods.

"Then why alter it? Or is it no future at all? *What is it?*"

"Ah, that delicate moment when you sell your soul!"

"So that's it, is it? You want to be paid? *What with?*"

"Why, with the experience of what it is to be, Johnny."

"I don't understand."

"We can infuse you, like a glass of milk drunk down and entirely digested, becoming part of every cell in your body, every nerve path in your mind. Passing down to your children, and to theirs. You'll be unaware of it. Unaware of us, as will your children be, and theirs. It'll simply be as though, suddenly, you have inherited a soul. You will know the one true future, and then you'll be just as before: you'll know it no longer, but you'll set out to reach it. And you'll become that future. And you'll have got rid of us and of the changes because we'll be at one with you in that future, for ever more. But you have to open your heart and mind to us freely."

"And what happens if we won't let you...incarnate yourselves in us?"

"Inevitably we shall wrap your world in shrouds of possibility. Causality will ruin itself. Many time-lines will coexist. There will be *chaos* for you — until probability worlds become so multiplied that the winds of the multiverse can blow us away again. But for you it will be too late."

"So it's tails we lose, heads you win."

"But you *don't* lose. You gain your one true future. And we attain reality: your single reality." Liz smiles.

"Is your problem how you, as one representative, may possibly bind your whole race? At a distant enough time in the future, Johnny, as your genes mix and co-mix again, eventually you will be part of all of your kind. This is how a bargain with your single self binds

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everyone, in the long run. And this of course proves—"that we have millions of years ahead of us! So the future has to work out, or you couldn't possibly make this offer? But...ah, have you offered this deal to other races out in space?" Other races, who may have refused — even at the expense of their own solid reality? Because the alternative was worse?

"Perhaps there are no other beings, but yourselves? Perhaps there are only waves of probability elsewhere? Here alone is the seed crystal, found after long searching. Perhaps. Choose, Johnny. It grows urgent. Drink us down deep into you — or be haunted by shifting realities till your world becomes a kaleidoscope."

"God Almighty, what sort of choice is that? Get on with it. Immerse yourself in me. Yourselves, whatever you are!"

Liz comes closer.

"How better shall such knowledge be conveyed, than in a kiss? With this kiss I seal your own true future. A kiss that swoons you..."

*** **

The one true future history of humanity. Yes, oh yes indeed. All that. But it's the *tragedy* that most of all I understand. Their tragedy, and ours...

For this single moment, this simple moment almost banal except for its rather weird surrounding circumstances, is the moment of creation.

Why did we ever think that creation had to begin at the beginning? Creation does not — *did* not — occur fifteen billion years ago. Nor does it occur fifty billion years hence, when the universe swallows itself up and vomits itself out again. It occurs right here, right now. There is nothing particularly privileged about this moment a quarter or a fifth of the way through "time," except that it is the *one*.

Until now — but no longer — all cosmoses equally coexisted, each redeeming the other from random nonexistence by probabilistic interplay. No longer so. Now only one cosmos exists. Hereafter, one cosmos. Herebefore, one cosmos.

Before, in the parallel streams of the multiverse, there could never be any such thing as a true beginning. But now there is one definite beginning. And because of this, there can be a definite ending too. At last a single universe is locked into place, into one reality. The flux is finished; the wave function of the multiverse has collapsed. Like undescended testicles the Godly essences of probability have now descended into existence, into being at last. They have found what they have been looking for since forever. Now they can die; they can cease to be — at last. Not yet, of course — but thirty or forty billion years downtime, when this single universe reaches its end and becomes nonexistent.

That huge span of history — of our evolving glory, yes I can say that: the glory of our future proliferation and growth even beyond Andromeda, and beyond the local family of galaxies — is as nothing compared with...with the infinite realms of probability sustaining forever a multiverse, which now is no more.

They have achieved absolute actuality through us, and so one day they can cease. They can die once our great future history — so much vaster than the paltry

thousand year span granted to Faust — draws to its absolute *finis*. Now the universe *is*; and sometime ahead, it isn't any longer.

They are, in a sense — oh yes, I see now — *ourselves*, a mode of perception scattered across all the branching multiverse, a universal metaconsciousness. Now, that multiverse is no more. Creation *is*, instead: one solid, self-consistent creation. Which will cease. Forever.

No wonder they — or it — spoke the language of macroprobability to us. It was what sustained them, and the ghostly multiverse. But now macroprobability is dead. The fluid has been crystallized in a shock wave, as multiverse collapses into universe — though on the quantum level microprobability still continues, until the end.

The end.

God, then, will have died, and achieved nothingness. Have I killed God by incarnating Him? God wished to die. Yes, I've drunk the milk of knowledge from Her lips...

Life binds time. Life is rare. Rare as it is, other wiser alien races have been made this offer down the aeons. Though their reality fell apart — for a very long time, into terrible ages of chaos, of multiplicity, shifting world lines, till eventually it knit again into a semblance of the old causality — they all refused to accept, for the sake of true infinity and eternity. All, that is, except for us. And how we will be rewarded for it! Oh glory, oh woe.

Or John Farrer strolls the curving meadows of Celesteville, arm in arm with Maria Menotti, who is dressed only in brief shorts. Five kilometres apart curving forests hang over their heads. Sunlight peeks through the thirty-klick long window panels, from the space mirrors. John and Maria come to a rustic chalet. Here they strap on wings.

And briefly, so briefly that they are hardly aware of it, a curious event occurs. As they prepare to launch themselves aloft, a solitary flamingo beats by, swishing the air. And, for a timeless moment, for an immeasurable time, it halts on the wing. Before flying on. John's heart thumps. No, it merely skipped a beat.

Now John and Maria fly up too. They fly up. Most of the way towards the mid-axis. Then they lie back in the tropical air. They bask. They will make winged love soon.

John preens himself.

"There's enough fuel tucked away in old Sol to last for almost ever. Billions of years is almost forever. Oh, we've come through! And long, long before forever we'll be out among the stars — even among the galaxies!"

"Such certainty," Maria laughs. "And how soulful you sound."

"But I *am* certain. I *do* know. Somehow."

"Maybe we've already done it, in some alternate world?" she teases. "Gone out to the stars fifty years ago!"

"No," says John, with entire conviction. "There aren't any alternate worlds. If there were, you would have an infinite amount of time in parallel. The universe — no, the *multiverse* — would be never-ending.

And obviously it isn't. But I don't think that need bother us." He returns the mirrored smile of the sun. "Almost forever is fine by me!"

He reaches for her. Daedalus and a lady Icarus make love, high above the man-made world. In actual

fact they are falling slowly as they entwine; but so slowly that they have plenty of time. And though they do not know it, this is the moment of conception.

— ABO —

Aborigines

(Continued from page 55)

friend who uses mostly synthesizer in his work to create a soothing rhythm and a "spacey" feel, she says.

The role of science fiction in our society and its relation to real science is the topic of an experimental television program titled (SF)2: *Science Fiction/Science Fact*, co-sponsored by NASA and Michigan State University and appearing on many PBS stations October 22.

The one-hour, live show will feature a panel discussion by scientist/science fiction authors including scientist and ABO contributor John E. Stith, who wrote "Doing Time" in our last issue and is the author of *Memory Blank* and the newly released *Death Tolls*.

He joins Ben Bova, Charles Sheffield, NASA scientist Jesco von Puttkamer, G. Harry Stine, Dr. Robert L. Forward, National Science Foundation scientists in Antarctica, and Arthur C. Clarke from Sri Lanka, all linked via satellite.

According to John Bluck of NASA's Lewis Research Center, science fiction is the topic, but the purpose of the show is to test the capabilities of interactive television.

Bluck is interested in the education possibilities, and he has his eye on the next decade, when newer, more powerful communications satellites will be coming on line.

The show will test a variety of available technologies, Bluck says. For example, science fiction artists in Utah and Connecticut will feed "live" illustrations via slo-scan TV, a process which freezes video pictures and allows them to be transmitted over phone lines.

A 15-page article by Puttkamer, "Reflections on a Crystal Ball: Science Fiction vs. Science

Fact" will be broadcast in a 10-second "computer burst," black and white bars which can be video recorded and then deciphered by a special board recently developed for IBM compatible personal computers.

And people at home will have a



Wendy Rathbone

chance to participate, at least those who own personal computers and are subscribers of the Compuserve network.

Compuserve is donating its network for the communications experiment and subscribers may send questions and comments to the TV studio panel during the live hour.

Bluck says this "electronic field trip" will be broadcast Oc-

tober 22 at 8 p.m. EST on many PBS stations. If you happen to have your own satellite dish, you can pick up the program from the satellite WESTAR IV, transponder 12 D.

Wendy Rathbone is the author of the poem "Flashing the Black Long Streets."

Rathbone makes her living selling media merchandise at science fiction conventions and through mail order and providing typing and binding services.

She says she has never stopped writing since the age of 13.

Rathbone has three self-published books of poetry and poems in the publications *Pandora*, *Star Line*, *2 Miscellaneous*, *Nightmare Express* and *Mystic Muse*.

She is working on a fourth poetry book and several short stories.

Rathbone says among the things she loves are her 10 pet cats, her horse, Chinese and Japanese poetry, and TV sitcoms.

— ABO —

ABO Salutes The 1987 Hugo Winners

ABO extends its congratulations to all of the 1987 Hugo winners who include:

Orson Scott Card — Best Novel, *Speaker for the Dead*

Robert Silverberg — Best Novella, "Gilgamesh in the Outback"

Roger Zelazny — Best Novelette, "Permafrost"

Greg Bear — Best Short Story, "Tangents"

Brian W. Aldiss — Best Non Fiction, *Trillion Year Spree*

Jim Burns — Best Artist

Terry Carr — Best Editor

— ABO —

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These covers are big. Most of them are 11 by 14 inches and are mounted and matted, ready for framing at \$35 each.

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For more information, or to order prints, please write to:

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